

Stranger Tides by Hatter23

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Summary: It's 1798 and mysterious creatures have invaded England, Will and Eleven have escaped the horror on the ship, H.M.S Hawk. Will and Eleven, disguised as a boy, try to find their way on this new adventure. But, El finds herself falling in love with fellow ships boy, Mike, who thinks she's a boy. Friendship, love and adventure awaits. MILEVEN FLUFF! Story is better than description!

1. Captain

Okay, it's been a couple of years since I've written a Fanfiction, but I absolutely love Stranger Things especially the whole Mileven ship as well. I thought this would be a good chance to get back into writing as well. This story is set in the late 1700's there are definitely some elements of the show, but there is also a lot of heavy influence from one of my favorite books Bloody Jack.

This will definitely be a Mileven story, but I really needed to set up the story first, so please give it some time, I promise it will only be the first 3-4 chapters before they come together.

Enjoy! And I do not own Stranger Things nor Bloody Jack.

Chapter 1: Captain

Rain crashed down heavily upon the restless sea as it swirled and crashed, a never ending dance in the unforgiving water. The dark sky above was letting loose a fearsome roar. Lightning webbed its way across the thick clouds illuminating the everlasting darkness.

Down below as the waves churned and crashed a large English frigate fought its way through the barrelling sea. Men of various ages ran about, some grabbing lines as others knotted and tied the ropes to the belaying pins neatly placed on the side of the ship. Midshipman yelled across the raging storm, barking orders to the able bodied sailors, as they desperately fought to keep their ship afloat.

"Open the mainsail!", "Keep that rigging tight!", "Don't just stand there, get to your post!" were shouted out to the men of the ship.

Taking in the sight around him, the captain stood humbly on the quarterdeck his eyes raking across the deck as he watched his men move hastily about, his hands resting behind his back. "Captain, orders?!" officer Powell comes to stand hastily next to the rugged man his breath heavy with anxiety.

The Captain looks ahead of his ship as he takes in the storm around

him, he has no worry about the storm, no, what he is concerned about is the part of the ocean they are about to enter, the Bermuda Triangle.

He looks over to his commanding officer and lets out a sigh, "Keep the *Hawk*, as stable as she be, this is just the beginning, we need to get her to the center of the storm" he says leisurely as he makes his way down the stairs leading to the main deck.

The ship keels sharply to the left, men sliding from their positions as the drenched deck provides little grip for them to stay stable. Some men not so lucky as they are sharply cast over the railings being claimed by the sea. The Captain barely lays his hand down to steady himself as he positions his body to move with the ship, years of practice has made him one with his mighty vessel.

Powell stumbles behind him, just righting himself as he stands behind the Captain. "Sir, this is mad, we cannot face this storm, at this rate we will lose more men overboard than what's ever in the damn center of that dreaded sea!" he shouts.

The Captain merely chuckles as he easily makes his way past his officers and chaos that fills the ship. He climbs the next set of stairs leading to the fo'c'sle and pulls out his long glass, aiming it forward to the center of the storm.

There he sees the clouds thicker and darker than he had ever seen before, lightning rains down in thick bolts a warning to most, but for the Captain it is merely a challenge.

"Steady forward, we have to make it there, for the sake of our country" the Captain commands to Powell who looks at him in shock.

"B-B-But...Captain, the men....t-t-the ship..." Powell stuttered nervously until the Captain turned harshly and grabbed Powell by the collar of his suit. "They all knew the dangers of coming on this ship" the Captain hissed into Powell's face. "You know the King's order, there aren't many of us blessed with a ship like the *Hawk*, and this is where we need to go before it gets any worse!" he barks as he throws Powell back.

Powell looks at the Captain with wide, fearful eyes "How do we know this is where it is coming from?" he asks shakily.

The Captain turns back to Powell slowly before giving him a harrowing stare "We don't, but it's the best we have to go on, now, direct this ship towards the center of this storm before I keelhaul you myself!" he shouts as he turns sharply away from Powell making his way back to the quarterdeck.

Powell looks over the crew who have momentarily stopped their onslaught of movements as they heard the Captain yelling over the ferocious storm. Powell eyes them narrowly as he raises his voice against the storm "You heard Captain Hopper, aim the *Hawk* to the center of the storm!"

The men look warily about but quickly pick up their movements once again as they aim the ship towards the dark eye of the storm.

Captain Hopper looks over his crew once more as the ship turns sharply, cutting across the savage waves. He reaches between his lapel and pulls out a long golden chain, where a circular, blue locket rests in the center. He opens it carefully with one hand and stares at the pictures nestled inside.

Two pictures, one of a lovely blue eyed lady and the other a blue eyed and blonde haired girl. He caresses the little girls picture softly, and sighs. "Keep us safe Sara" he whispers to wind, as he hastily closes the pendant and re-tucks it back under his lapel. His eyes scan the horizon once more hoping it is not the last time.

2. Eleanor

I wanted to publish 2 chapters in the beginning so that the premise was understood. I promise that by chapter 5 there will be Mileven! I just really needed to have premise of the story before I got into their relationship.

Also, since this story takes place in kind of the "Old English" time I made some of their names more "Old English" like Eleven's real name will be Eleanor in this story and I will reference to many of the kids by their full names until they establish nicknames.

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

England 1798

The streets of England were bustling as always. People making their way from shop to shop as they searched for their needs.

A woman stood with two youths as she purchased a loaf of bread for their household. "That'll be one penny miss" the old breadmaker held out his hand in exchange for the bread. "Yes, of course, the middle aged woman stated as she fished into her apron and produced a small brown penny and placed it into the breadmakers floured hand.

"Pleasure as always" the breadmaker tipped his floppy white hat to the woman as she handed the bread to the male youth standing beside her. "William, would you take this for me please?" she asked as he diligently took the bread for his mother "Yes, mother" the boy whispered as he cradled the bread in his arms.

"Now, come on you two, I need to get Eleanor back and start on dinner before her father notices she is gone" the woman ushered both of the youths around the busy market place with a hand on each of their shoulders.

The young girl sighed and rolled her eyes as she heaved the large basket filled with vegetables, she was holding further up her arm for more support. The woman noticed the girls hesitance at the mention

of her home.

The woman took that moment to pull the girl into her side and gave her a small squeeze. "It'll be okay Eleanor, things will get better".

The young girl looked up into the woman's rich brown eyes with her own and gave her a small smile, but quickly looked back down to her feet as they winded their way across the streets.

Eleanor knew things wouldn't get better. Ever since her mother died nearly four years ago, something changed within her father, and a darkness seemed to envelope him from the inside out. Gone was the once warm and caring father, which was now replaced with a dark and borderline cruel man she did not know.

Her mother was a light like no other, and as Eleanor believed, once her light went out, so did her fathers. Especially since her mother was taken so quickly and so suddenly without any warning, the sickness that started as something so small, had taken her in three days time. Now her house seemed like a dark omen, where light was not allowed to shine.

Eleanor's only solace was found with their housemaid, Joyce, and her son, William, in which both had been apart of her life since the day she was born, even though she was older than William by a couple of months, they had grown up almost like siblings.

She looked up to the woman who had become her sole mother figure moments after her mother's passing, she wished it could be just them, William, Joyce and her, away from her father, to start anew, but she knew that would never happen.

The large brick house that stood on the outskirts of town was one of the more prominent homes established in their little town. She did consider herself lucky, for her needs were always met and she never went hungry. Her father was one of the few doctors in the town, so there was always a steady income.

She often thought of the children she would see on the street who wore rags for clothes, and were covered head to toe in filth. Many of them held out their small hands as they begged "Please ma'am, please

sir, we've got no food, no parents to take care of us". It broke her heart every time, guilty of knowing what she had and what they did not.

Eleanor was brought out of her thoughts once Joyce spoke as they entered the home "Ok, it looks like your father isn't home yet Eleanor, so we got lucky this time" she smiled at the girl, who returned the smile to her.

"Thank you for carrying this today Eleanor, my back isn't..." Joyce began to take the basket away from Eleanor when a loud, eerily calm voice broke her sentence. "Why is my daughter holding *your* basket".

All three of their heads looked quickly up the stairs where an older gentleman stood, his hands held behind his back as he observed the three.

Eleanor's eyes went wide with fear, she wasn't allowed outside the home, only if and ONLY if her father was to accompany her, and those occasions came rarely. Joyce had taken it upon herself usually once a week to take Eleanor and William with her into the market, usually when her father was not home and would not be home till late in the evening.

Joyce open and closed her mouth, unsure with what to say only small sounds coming out. Eleanor swallowed her fear quickly as she looked up at her father. "I heard them come home, papa and I was just greeting them, I noticed that the basket seemed heavy, so, I offered to help" she lied smoothly as if she had rehearsed it a thousand times in her head.

Eleanor hoped this would appease her father, she continued to stare at him, his cold grey eyes watching her closely. He huffed as he very slowly stepped down the stairs to the foyer. "That was kind of you Eleanor" he spoke softly, another step. "But, you know my rules" another step down, his eyes never leaving hers.

"You, are to be a fine lady, and fine ladies do not deal with the help" he stated matter of factly taking two more steps down. Eleanor felt her bravery leave her body as she felt the overwhelming familiar feeling of submission fill her body. Her father's eyes continued to

bare down on her as she felt her gaze drop down, now afraid to meet her father's eyes.

Finally her father made his way down the stairs as he stood directly in front of Eleanor he lifted his hand and firmly grabbed her chin and brought her head up to look at him. Eleanor could only look into his eyes as hers began to water, immobilizing fear filling her.

"Do I make myself clear, Eleanor?" he asked coolly his face as stiff as stone.

She could feel herself shaking slightly "Yes...papa" she whispered shakily.

Her father continued look at her, his eyes narrowing as if looking for any bit of lie, Eleanor wishing he would just let go.

After what felt like an eternity he swiped his hand away from her chin "Good girl" he cooed. Eleanor looked away from him, desperately fighting the tears that wanted to let loose, she would not cry in front of him, she would not show weakness.

Eleanor's father turned to look back at Joyce his voice still calm and eerie as ever, "Now, Mrs. Beyers, I expect you and your son to make your way back to your quarters, and I expect dinner to be served within the next two hours, do I make myself clear" he leveled his gaze to Joyce.

Joyce looked hesitantly up at Eleanor's father barely meeting his gaze and gave him a quick nod as she looked back down, "Yes Dr. Brenner, I'll be sure to have everything set" she curtsied as she grabbed the basket of vegetables, William's hand as they made their way back into their quarters.

Eleanor stayed silent and still in her spot, waiting for her father to leave before she made her next move.

Dr. Brenner looked back over towards his daughter and sighed "Oh, Eleanor, when will you learn, the help will only bring you down in life, you need to be enveloping yourself with more refined people".

Eleanor could barely hold back the rage in which filled her body, she

wanted to yell, to scream at him, that what he was asking him was nearly impossible since she spent most of her time locked up, which was his doing. How was she supposed to meet these "refined" people he spoke of if she was never allowed out.

As if he had read her mind Dr. Brenner spoke "I throw all these lavish parties, invite kids over your age, and you never seem to connect with them" he shook his head in disapproval.

Eleanor refrained from rolling her eyes, these kids her age he spoke of were just stuck up brats, who didn't care for her or anyone else, all they saw was her rich lifestyle and how they could weasel their way into it. Even at the age of eleven, Eleanor felt as if her father was parading her around like some sort of prize winning cattle, trying to sell her off to the highest bidder. She hated every single one of those parties and wished she never had to attend them.

But, instead of lashing out at her father, Eleanor continued to look away from him and just gave him a small nod to recognize that she had heard what he had said. And with that Dr. Brenner put a large hand on her shoulder and gave it a rough squeeze as he bent down and whispered into her ear "You will obey me daughter, if you know what's good for you".

She felt a cold shiver run up her spine, what had happened to her father? This was not the same person who had once loved her and cared for her like she was the most precious thing on this Earth.

Eleanor felt his hand leave her shoulder as he finally made his way past her and headed towards his study. She hadn't moved. Dr. Brenner placed his hand on the knob of his study turning it slowly, he opened the door and began to enter, when he stopped suddenly and looked at Eleanor once more. "Oh, and don't forget what night it is, it's a full moon, so be sure to have William board your windows", he looked at her for a response in which she gave another small nod, and with that he entered his study.

Eleanor finally felt a little more relaxed, but the tears that had been threatening her eyes were finally coming in waves. She felt her body stiffen as it began to wrack against her tears. She ran up the flight of stairs and into her room.

She threw the door open and fell against her soft pink comforter. She buried her head in her pillow as she began to sob uncontrollably into it.

Eleanor felt the hot tears stream down her cheeks, as thoughts of her cold father surfaced. She could barely stand it anymore, the threats, the coldness, everything about him made her increasingly afraid of her father. But, she also felt even more so alone as it seemed he continued to push everything she loved and cared about away from her. Joyce, William, her only two she truly cared about were being pushed away and she hated everything about it.

Eleanor felt her body calm down a bit and she turned her head to look out her window, which faced directly at the ocean. She sniffled a bit as she turned and made her way over to the large window. Below she could see the crashing blue waves, the soft sandy beach. And a couple miles away she could see the harbor in which numerous vessels sat docked.

She had always admired this view and spent countless hours watching the sea, and sailors. How she had always wished that she could just run away and join a ship, sail around the world and get away from this terrible place. But, this was something she knew could never be. She had heard from sailors and townsfolk alike that woman were rarely let on a ship, they were thought to be bad luck. So, Eleanor accepted this fact as she looked out at the horizon.

The sun was going to be hitting the water soon, for it began to slowly turn the sky from a faded blue, to a rich yellow. She sighed as she also knew what this night brought as well. She knew as the sun would eventually set and the waters turned dark, as she would sleep a fog would roll in, bringing an even more terrifying thought with it.

Eleanor finished wiping her tears away, knowing that she should be going to ask William to put the boards up on the windows. Even with how bad things had gotten around her home, what lay outside on a full moon night was even more terrifying than her own problems. She shuddered at the thought. She stood from her window and made her way out of her room to search for William.

Eleanor made her way down the stairs and stopped when she made it to the bottom. She slowly took in her surroundings making sure that her father was nowhere near. No noise indicated that he was up and moving, so she made her way towards the kitchen hoping to find William.

As she approached the kitchen she could smell a delicious aroma wafting from the semi-opened door. "Oh, shoot!" she heard Joyce cry, Eleanor smiled a little at hearing this, knowing that a mistake or two were prevalent each time Joyce was in the kitchen.

"Ugh!", she heard another noise come from the older woman as Eleanor made her way into the kitchen she made her way towards the preparation table and placed her elbows upon it, resting her head in her hands.

Joyce had her head in the brick oven that took up most of the kitchen. Eleanor chuckled at the sight, the woman was always peculiar to her.

"Is everything ok?" Eleanor questioned with a grin on her face. Suddenly Joyce pulled her head from the oven, Eleanor covered her mouth from laughing for, Joyce's face was covered in black soot, and even her hair sported some as well.

Joyce shook her head and waved her hands in exasperation, "This oven is too deep for a small woman like me to get the damn thing to light!" she explained.

Eleanor still smiling at the poor woman stood up and made her way next to the older woman, "It can't be that bad" Eleanor explained peering into the dark stove where numerous pieces of wood lay, ready to be lit.

"If you think it's so easy, why don't you try it, Ellie" Joyce chuckled as she wiped a bit of black coal against Eleanor's nose. Eleanor adored it when Joyce had called her "Ellie", it was the nickname her mother had given her when she was a little girl and Joyce had also picked up using it when it was just the two of them, or if William was present.

"No, thank you" Eleanor backed away from the stove as a disheveled

Joyce shook her head back and forth unsure as to what to do. "Well" she started putting her hands on her hips, "I guess it will have to be soup tonight, at least I can manage to get the fire lit under the cauldron just fine" she joked.

Eleanor smiled at Joyce and nodded "Soup sounds perfect Joyce" she stated as Joyce made her way to the preparation table where she began peeling potatoes. Eleanor just remembering why she had come down to the kitchen in the first place turned to Joyce "Where's Will?" she questioned.

Not looking up from her potato peeling Joyce nodded her head towards the door leading outside "He's in the barn finishing up his night chores" she stated.

Eleanor nodded at the comment "Papa wanted me to make sure that Will put up the boards in my window tonight, on the count that there will be a full moon tonight".

Joyce stopped peeling for a moment and sighed placing her knife down onto the counter. "Yes, that's right it is a full moon tonight" she shuddered suddenly.

"Please make sure your's and Will's windows are boarded up to" Eleanor said quietly.

Joyce gave her a small smile as she reached her hand across the table to place it on top of Eleanor's "Don't you worry Ellie, we will be safe too" she said as she picked up her knife again to resume her peeling. "It's those with nowhere to go you should be worried about" she said sadly.

Eleanor looked down at her hands in her lap, she did think of that very statement often. It was an interesting topic to think and or talk about amongst most people. Many barely liked to talk about it at all. Those who had a home and were safe didn't really care what happened, as long as it wasn't them or someone in their family, then why did it matter?

"Do you think it will ever stop" Eleanor thought out loud not looking up from her lap. She heard Joyce heave a heavy sigh "I'm not sure

Ellie, but I hope it does soon, it only seems to be getting worse".

Eleanor nodded at the comment as she looked up and out the window in the kitchen gazing out at the horizon, she could see the sun dipping even lower into horizon, *it wouldn't be long now*, she thought to herself as she thought back to the first night the creatures had attacked.

2 Years Ago

It was the dead of night, the town was silent, illuminated by the full moon in which had finally reached its peak in the dark sky. However, a thick fog began to roll its way into the small town. Mysteriously though, it only made its way into a quarter of the town before it stopped.

Eleanor heard a deafening scream pierce the silent night, she sat up suddenly unsure of what she had just heard. She frantically looked around her room to understand what was going on. Her breathing came somewhat rapidly as she tried to comprehend what had just woken her. She waited listening carefully to the sounds of the house, all she could hear was the crashing of the waves from her open window.

Eleanor let out a breath, "It must have just been a cat or something" she said aloud as she settled back into her sheets as she pulled her stuffed lion closer.

"WHAM!" Eleanor shot up out of bed so quickly, her heart racing in her chest as she looked towards her bedroom door in which had opened suddenly, registering that Will had just ran into her room and grabbed at her arm "We need to go, NOW!" his small voice scared and unsure.

Eleanor had no idea as to what in the world was happening, but she wasn't going to ask questions right this second. So, she obediently followed Will's directions as he pulled her down the stairs. At the bottom stood Joyce in her nightgown along with her father in his sleeping gown as well. "Eleanor!" he sounded worried, which surprised her since it seemed like forever since her father had shown

any emotion towards her. He pulled her into his arms and held her head close to his chest.

"What's going on?" she asked as calmly as she could looking up into her father's eyes. He stared back, in which Eleanor could only see one thing, he was scared too, and to see her father so vulnerable actually made her feel even more afraid.

Dr. Brenner squeezed her hand as he lead them towards their basement in which had a thick wooden door. "We aren't sure, but there are people screaming and running about outside, there's fire's wracking the town as well, we need to get somewhere safe" he managed to get out as he ushered them all into the cellar.

Upon entering the cellar, Eleanor immediately felt the cold hit her body, she wrapped her arms around herself to stay warm. She also noticed that Joyce had grabbed a candle in which was lit in her small orange glow illuminating all of their worried faces.

Even though the door to the basement was thick, Eleanor could start to hear the commotion from outside. The yelling, the screaming, Eleanor closed her eyes and held her hands to her ears willing whatever was happening to go away.

They sat in silence for what seemed like an eternity, no one spoke, afraid of what may happen if they did.

After some time Dr. Brenner spoke "I don't hear much anymore, I'm going..." but before he could finish the shattering of glass erupted from behind the wooden door.

Eleanor reached for Joyce who held her and Will tightly to her, careful to keep the candle safely away from them.

They could hear something shuffling about in the hallway in which the cellar door sat. Eleanor squeezed her eyes shut as she let out a whimper. "Shh!" her father said suddenly anger written on his face. Eleanor frowned at his reaction, thinking that if her mother were there she would have scolded him for his behavior.

Dr. Brenner held up his hand to make sure none of them spoke. They

all listened carefully to the sounds that were making their way through the wooden door.

Eleanor listened as she could hear something shuffling throughout the house. She could have sworn she heard a low growl as well, whatever it was, to her it did not sound friendly.

They sat and listened for a long time, long enough where Eleanor, Will and Joyce drifted off to sleep.

The next thing Eleanor remembered from that night was that she had been woken by Joyce who was shaking both her and Will awake. "Come on you two, Dr. Brenner went out and examined the house, there's nothing here".

Eleanor stood from her spot and slowly made her way out of the cellar examining the now disheveled house around her. There was broken glass scattered about, tables, pictures, nicknacks were littered across the floor as well. She made sure to make her way slowly to the kitchen avoiding any broken glass.

She made her way to the kitchen where she met her father, who was now dressed and was sitting across from another man sitting in the kitchen as they talked in hushed voices. "They were terrible, decaying creatures" the man whispered. "No faces either, just big open mouths with rows of razor sharp teeth!" he shuddered.

Eleanor watched as her father shook his head and sighed heavily "How's the town?" he asked.

The other man shook his head solemnly "Well" he sighed "It's funny, it's only a quarter of the town that got hit, and no one past the church got hit either".

Her father gave the man a quizzical look "How's that possible?" he asked the man who only shrugged "No idea, hopefully that was it though, there are about 30 dead, and no one could kill one of those things either".

Eleanor heard herself gasp at the mans remark and both men turned to look at her, Dr. Brenner gave her a quick scowl knowing that she

had been listening to the men, but quickly changed knowing there was someone else here "Eleanor" he stated "How are you doing?".

She gave a small shrug to the answer, not really wanting to get into a conversation with her father, but her curiosity got the better of her "Did creatures really attack last night?" she asked both the men.

She watched her father slump his shoulders and shake his head and she watched the other man copy him almost as if he was her father's reflection.

"Yes Eleanor, something did attack apart of the town last night but we-" he started before Eleanor interrupted him "Are people ok?", "What's going to happen?", "Are we safe?" the questions seemed to burst out of her without a second thought, her father's eyes going wide with a look that said "Stop, you're being a nuisance".

She breathed heavily as she looked between the two men, wishing one or both would give her the answer. Instead her father rose to his feet and made his way over to Eleanor he crouched down so he was eye level "Look, whatever happened I'm sure it was just a one time thing, you have nothing to worry about...sweetie" he added hesitantly.

Eleanor furrowed her eyebrows "sweetie?" the last time he used that nickname was when her mother was still alive, she was definitely seeing the other side of her father, the one that wanted to be only admired by others, by putting on a show in front of company.

She knew she would get nowhere with him so she nodded her head and headed out of the kitchen.

Eleanor made her way up to her bedroom, she had slept horribly throughout the night and felt a wave of exhaustion hit her. She knew her father would scold her for sleeping in, but she found herself not caring. She pulled herself into her still unmade bed and hoisted the covers so that they were covering her head, she hugged her stuffed lion against her.

As she let her mind settle the days events, she did hope one thing was true about what her father said, that this was a "one time thing" and

it won't happen again.

However, little did Eleanor know, nor anyone in her town, was, that it was only going to get worse.

Present

Eleanor shook the memories away from her mind because the events had only gotten worse each time. After four months of the attacks, the town eventually began to learn the pattern. A full moon is what brings the creatures, the fog that rolls in keeps them in a contained area, for they never travelled outside the fog, that they seemed to go for easy prey, those who weren't protected and that once the morning sun rose, they disappeared as if they were never there.

But, as two years of the attacks strung on it became clear that this wasn't going to stop, and the worst part was it was only getting worse. Each month the fog bank expanded, the creatures came sooner in the night, and they were growing. Eleanor remembers listening to a person out in the market reciting that he had seen the beasts, but instead of being on four legs like they had always been, the one he had seen was standing upright and was much bigger.

It also seemed that it was spreading all the way up into Ireland as well. She had read in the paper that the King was sending out patrols in the sea to find out what was happening but very little was known as to if anything was being found.

Eleanor only hoped that whatever these creatures were, they would leave herself and her family alone.

Okay, let me know what you think! Chapter 3 will be here tomorrow! Please no flames, I'm just getting back into writing.

3. Broken

This chapter is a little bit shorter than the last one, but again still setting the premise. The next chapter is much longer, and chapter five will finally introduce the other boys! I hope you all are enjoying the story so far!

Will had finally made his way back into the kitchen, Eleanor held her nose and pretended to gag at his smell of fresh manure. "You stink!" she stated.

Will frowned, but made his way over to Eleanor "Oh, yeah?" "Well at least *someone* takes care of your animals for you to eat", he got closer to her as she tried to move away holding her breath. "What, don't want a hug from brother Will, El?" he asked as he held out his arms to try to give her a hug.

She laughed as she swatted him away "Ew, no get away, you need a bath!" she stated getting as far away from him as she could.

Joyce walked up to Will and gave him a quick sniff, her nose shot up in disgust, "Ugh, yes, you're getting a bath tonight William".

Will rolled his eyes but shrugged, he didn't mind baths knowing he wouldn't smell like a barn anymore.

"Before that though, would you mind getting the windows boarded for us?" Eleanor asked batting her big brown eyes up at him.

He sighed, but smiled all the same, "Of course, I forgot tonight was a full moon" he stated as he made his way into the house. "It won't take me long, call me for supper?" he asked his mother, "Yes of course William" she stated as she shooed him off as she continued to prepare their meal.

Dinner rolled around for the Brenner family, and as usual Eleanor sat silently as she watched her father read the newspaper until Joyce had brought in dinner.

She sighed, bored as always at this time of the day, at least for breakfast and lunch she was able to eat with at least Joyce each day and sometimes Will if his chores were done. But Will also spent a lot of his free time playing with some of the other local boys, in which Eleanor was extremely jealous of.

Will was literally her only friend. But, she couldn't blame him for going off and galavanting with boys his age. She just wished she had the same privileges he did. Instead, she often sat at home alone, waiting for him to come and play with her.

She had a tutor, Ms. Ruthford, who would come to the home four times a week, to engage Eleanor in reading, writing and sewing. But the woman was an old biddy and smelt of fish and she was not on Eleanor's most friendly list.

Eleanor couldn't wait for the day to be free of this home. She imagined herself meeting a fine boy, who would call her pretty, and would take her to see the world, she sighed at her imagination.

She was shaken from her daydream when Joyce brought in two steaming bowls of soup. "It's about damn time" Dr. Brenner stated aggravated at having to wait an extra two minutes for dinner. He folded up his paper neatly and set it in the chair beside him, mother's old chair, Eleanor thought sadly.

"I-I'm sorry Dr. Brenner" Joyce stuttered as she placed the bowls in front of himself and Eleanor who gave Joyce a small "I'm sorry" smile. Joyce only winked at her in return.

Eleanor grabbed at her spoon as she moved the soup back and forth in bowl, blowing on it to cool it down.

Joyce returned from the kitchen carrying a loaf of bread, in which she cut into neat slices, handing one to Eleanor and one to Dr. Brenner.

Dr. Brenner took a bite of the bread, Eleanor watched as his face turned to disgust as he spat the bread out towards Joyce.

"What is this garbage!?" he demanded throwing the rest of the

uneaten bread onto the table.

Joyce only stared wide eyed at the man in front of her as she gingerly wiped away his spit from her apron "I-I-I don't know what you mean" she said quietly.

Dr. Brenner stood and grabbed the loaf of bread from the table and waved it in Joyce's face "Are you stupid or something, buying stale bread and feeding it to me as if I was some beggar off the streets" he slammed the bread down onto the table which juttred the silverware, and made his and Eleanor's soup spill from the edge.

"N-No sir, I bought it fresh today, as I always do" she shook her head dumbfounded at what had just occurred.

"Lies" Dr. Brenner seathed through his teeth as he put his face close to Joyce's panicked one.

"I bet you bought this bread from some low life for half the price and pocketed the change for yourself!" he yelled at the now shaking women.

"No, sir I swear, I always buy it from Mr. Griff, on Portland Street, you could ask him I was-" "SMACK" Joyce was thrown to the floor by Dr. Brenner's swift and hard slap to the poor women's face.

Eleanor sprang from her seat to quickly make her way towards the woman.

"Do you really think, I'm going to take the time to go and ask some baker if you were there today?" he growled at the woman who was now cradling her red cheek, tears streaming from her eyes.

Eleanor grabbed for the women to try to console her, she looked up at her father tears of anger brimming in her eyes. "Papa, ENOUGH!" she shouted as she looked at the women laying next to her.

"You know nothing what this woman is, Eleanor, I only kept her around because it was your mother's wish, but she's nothing but a liar!" he continued.

"She is not a liar!" Eleanor spat back "She got that bread fresh today I

was with-" she stopped short, fear making itself present in her body.

Her father narrowed his eyes at her and he slowly shook his finger towards her "You want to finish that sentence, Eleanor?" he challenged.

Eleanor shook her head, not wanting to answer. "*Stupid*" she yelled in her head, she let her anger get the better of her again and now she was caught.

"You better finish what you were saying Eleanor, before she gets another swift kick of my foot!" Dr. Brenner bellowed as he aimed his foot towards Joyce who cowered further into Eleanor.

"No, wait!" Eleanor pleaded as the tears began to trail down her face. She bit back a sob, "I-I-I went with Joyce and Will today to the market, I wanted to go because I get so bored here, a-a-and I have no friends and I want to see people and-" was as far as she got until her father brought his hand quickly and harshly against the side of her face.

She gasped at the contact as it knocked her back, she grappled for air at the shock of the impact. Her ears were ringing madly as well. She reached up to feel her face, her lip was split badly as she could taste the irony blood against her tongue.

Yes, her father had hit her before, but nothing like this, and this is when Eleanor felt truly afraid of her father.

She hesitantly looked back at him, who only had red raging eyes, his arm still positioned across his body after hitting her.

"Papa" she whispered as tears fell quickly from her eyes.

He narrowed his eyes at her and reached for her, roughly pulling her up, he held her uncomfortably close.

"I give you one rule, and you break it" he seethed, "Let's see how you like it when you are locked in your room until only, *I*, let you out!" he yelled into her face as he dragged her towards the staircase.

He clumsily pulled her up with him as he roughly brought her up the

stairs. He forcefully opened the door and threw her in.

Eleanor crumpled to the floor as she looked back at her father who towered over.

He brought his finger close to her face "You will stay here, and you will never leave" he growled as he stood to leave.

"And don't think that woman and her son will be staying either, they will be on the street tomorrow!" he yelled as he slammed the door shut, locking it behind him.

Panicked Eleanor lunged for the closed door as she hammered her fist against it "Papa!" she pleaded "Papa!" she cried again, ramming her fist on the door with all of her might, "Please, Papa!" she crumpled to the floor in anguish.

She sat with her back to the door and pulled her legs up close to her chest as she let all of the hurt, despair and sadness wash over her.

She felt truly alone in that one moment, she had no one, and she would never have anyone again. Her cries wracked her body, as she hiccuped into her knees, tears barrelling down her face.

Sleep finally took her as the exhaustion of her emotions finally broke her.

Hope you all enjoyed, I will upload chapter 4 tomorrow! Please review, any suggestions, how are you liking it so far?

4. Runaway

I'm going to keep trudging along with this story. I hope you are all enjoying it so far. I promise after this chapter it will be getting into what I really want to write about and that's getting Mike and Eleven connected. Which I think will move this story along much better.

Please Enjoy!

Her dreams were finally not nightmares tonight, in fact for once they were peaceful. She dreamt of her mother, whom's looks had begun to fade the longer she was gone. She felt her mother's gentle hands caress her face, she watched her smile and kiss her forehead.

"It will be okay" she heard her mother whisper into her ear as she began to fade away.

She couldn't say anything, she had no voice, she began to panic, but this was quickly forgotten as she shot awake to someone yelling her name and a fist banging on her door.

"El, El, it's me Will!" he shouted through her door. Eleanor was just beginning to comprehend what was happening as she shook sleep from her head.

"Will?" she whispered staring questioningly at the door.

"El, thank God!" he exclaimed, "Hey, you need to get away from the door, we need to get out of here, now!" he yelled.

Eleanor hesitantly stood up and stared at the door "Will, what's going on?" she asked.

"Those creatures, their back, and this time the whole town is covered in them, and there's more and their bigger and-" he paused "We just need to get you out of this room!" he finished.

"How?" she asked as she knew her door was locked from where Will stood, "Where's papa?" she asked hesitantly.

She heard Will sigh from the other side of the door "He's gone" he stated matter of factly.

Eleanor started back "Gone, w-w-what" she stuttered not finding the right words.

"It doesn't matter right now El" Will started, "We just need to get out of here".

Eleanor looked around the room to try to figure out how to get out of her room, but even if she did her door opened the other way. "Will, you have to open it from that side" she shouted quickly to him.

"Okay, I'll try" Will said as he backed away from the door and then ran at it as hard as he could. Eleanor heard the door give a little crack, while she also heard Will whimper an "Ow".

"Are you okay?" Eleanor asked tentatively, "Yeah" Will croaked.

"I think if you try one more time it will budge, the doors in this house aren't built well" Eleanor stated matter of factly.

"Ok" Will sighed as he backed away from the door again and tackled it roughly once again, this time cracking the door enough for Eleanor to pull on the knob with all her might as the door creaked on its hinges, it finally burst open.

"Unh" Will moaned as he rubbed his shoulder tenderly.

"Great job, Will" Eleanor stated as she approached him, he grabbed her arm and pulled her quickly to the stairs.

"I'll recover later, we need to get to my mom" he stated matter of factly as they ran towards the kitchen.

As Eleanor and Will made it to the kitchen, Eleanor noticed that Joyce was running around in a panicked pace as she was throwing a bunch of random items into an old seabag.

Eleanor finally got a moment to take everything in that was going on around her. She looked out the nearest window and saw that the town was a glow in red and yellow. Smoke was billowing out of

windows of nearby structures and she could hear the screaming of men, women and even children.

She was stunned in place at the fear factor that was now enveloping her whole feeling.

Joyce ran to Will and threw the seabag into his grasp, she pulled both of the children close to her "Will, Eleanor, you know you two are the most important things in this world to me" she started with a shaking voice.

Eleanor furrowed her brows at Joyce, where was she going with this?

Joyce took in a deep breathe and stared at both the kids with big watery eyes. "You both need to get out of here, and run".

Will spoke up "B-B-But mom, what about you?" he asked his voice warbling.

She placed a hand on his cheek and smiled "I need to stay here and make sure this place is okay".

Eleanor shook her head "No, no, my father was terrible to you!" she stated loudly.

Joyce smiled shyly, "It's still my home" she whispered "And I need to make sure there is one for you to return to".

"But mom, why would we leave?" Will asked his eyes filling with unshed tears.

Joyce rubbed his cheeks with her thumbs and smiled into his eyes "Because, they don't think this will be it this time, they think it's going to get worse this time" she answered honestly.

"I need you and Eleanor to be safe and to try to get as far away from here as possible" Joyce cried.

"The fog has yet to reach the harbor, please, try to find a way out of here, for me" she pleaded.

Eleanor could tell Will was having a difficult time accepting all of

this, so she reached for his hand and gave it a small squeeze. Will turned to look at Eleanor, tears were slowly dripping down his face. She gave him a small smile as she nodded her head.

Will turned back to his mom and brought her into a tight hug. "I love you mom" Will cried into his mother's shoulder. "I love you too, William" she placed a kiss against his head.

They slowly pulled apart Joyce gave her son a small smile and looked at the bag in his hands "Now, there's some clothes, and some food in here, and even a little money".

Will shook his head, "Mom, you need the money more-" he started before he was cut off by Joyce placing her hands over Will's "No, Will you two will take the money" she stated firmly.

Will was about to argue again when an ear piercing screech echoed around them, all three of them holding their hands to their ears.

"What was that?!" Eleanor asked exasperated as she removed her hands from her ears. Joyce shook her head, "That's what you two need to get away from, now you need to get going" she said hurriedly as she ushered them towards the door.

The kids moved outside and turned to take one last look at Joyce, unsure when the next time they would see her would be.

"Thank you Joyce, for everything" Eleanor moved to give the woman who had been like a second mother to her a goodbye hug in which Joyce gratefully returned. "I love you Ellie" she whispered into her hair. Eleanor fought back a sob at hearing her favorite nickname, "I love you too, Joyce" she pulled back from the woman who helped raised her.

They all gave each other once last fleeting look as Will grabbed Eleanor's hand and they both ran off into the thick fog.

Joyce watched with tears in her eyes as the two kids she loved the most in the world disappeared into the night.

Will and Eleanor ran side by side into the thick fog that covered

every inch of the small town.

Screams of terror rang out around them, they could barely see where they were going.

Will stopped suddenly, Eleanor almost crashing into him at his sudden stop, "What are you doing!?" she asked breathlessly.

"Shh!" Will hushed her quickly as he tried to scan their surroundings quickly. Eleanor stopped and took in her surroundings as well. The fog was immensely thick, the thickest she had ever seen. Joyce was right, she thought, it seemed things were only going to get worse after this night.

Both Will and Eleanor jumped as a loud, screeching roar pierced through the night, followed by many helpless screams of townsfolk.

"Will, we need to keep moving!" Eleanor pleaded as she shook the boys shoulder.

"I know El, but we need to-" he stopped short as Eleanor scrunched her eyes in confusion, as she watched Will's eyes go wide.

Eleanor turned to look at what Will was staring at, and she froze in fear. In the not too far distance as the fog hazed around and the smoke snaked its way through the town, they both caught a glimpse of the terrifying creature.

It was at least 8 feet tall, with long gnarly legs and thin arms that held long sharp fingers. They both watched, stunned, as the creature half crawled and walked, its large head turning this way and that, searching for something.

Eleanor grasped her hand tightly to Will's arm, petrified to move. They continued to watch the beast in horror.

Suddenly both of the children watched as the creature whipped its head towards them, both of them leapt from their feet.

The creature continued to aim its head in their direction, turning its head side to side as if it were an owl watching them from a tree.

Eleanor slowly began to back away slowly pulling Will along with her, *maybe*, she thought, *it hasn't decided what we are yet, and if we move slowly...* Her thoughts were immediately silenced as her wish was crushed by the fact that the creature lunged suddenly towards them, and began to dash in their direction.

"Will, run!" she shouted at the boy as she dragged him along as she began to sprint as fast as she could.

Thankfully Will's "fight or flight" notion seemed to kick in as he ran alongside Eleanor.

"Keep going, Will, we need to find a safe place to hide!" Eleanor gasped as she ran. She could hear the creature screeching behind her along with the its thunderous footsteps, she didn't want to even look to see where the creature was, petrified that it would be right there.

Will was breathing heavily beside Eleanor "We need to get to where there's no fog" he panted.

"I know...but we can barely...ahhh!" she screamed as she felt a sharp pain in her back as she stumbled to the ground.

"El!" Will shouted as he turned to help her, and as he did he heard a low growl in front of them. Will turned to see the monster that now towered over them, his eyes went wide at the sight.

"El, come on get up!" he shouted at the girl as he desperately tried to pull her up.

Eleanor struggled to get to her feet, but her adrenaline finally helped her rise and get close to Will.

They both watched in horror as the creature loomed over them, it was letting out a soft cry, debating on what it was going to do next.

Will clung to Eleanor's hand they turned to look at each other as they continued to back away from the creature.

He could see tears in her eyes, whether from the pain she was experiencing, or the fear of what was going to happen next, he did not know, but he knew he was scared for both of their lives.

They watched in shock as the creature began to lift its narrow arm back to strike, both Eleanor and Will cringed waiting for the impact as they both shut their eyes.

But, before any impact could be felt Eleanor felt her feet leave the ground as she pulled Will with her, they were falling.

Eleanor had little time to brace for the impact that followed as she felt her hand slip from Will's arm. She felt the rough earth and rock beneath her as she tumbled down a steep cliff.

She could hear Will beside her, both letting out huffs and groans as their bodies collided against the rocks.

It felt like they were falling and rolling forever, until Eleanor skidded against something soft and grainy. A puff of dust enveloped her as she finally stopped rolling.

She was breathing heavily, but in doing so made her inhale the dust that surrounded her and she began to cough harshly.

Will must have done the same because Eleanor heard his coughing not far from where she lay. She tentatively pushed herself up onto her arms and looked around as the dust settled around her.

That's when she heard it, the crashing of the waves, now clear as day, they had fallen down a cliff bank and now lay on the beach, she sighed in relief.

She turned towards her friend "Will?" she croaked, her body starting to feel the sting on her back and the soreness in her entire body from rolling down the hill.

"Ugh, El, are you, ok?" he asked horsley. Eleanor managed to shakily stand on her feet as she stumbled over to Will, who was now sitting up as well.

Eleanor fell to her knees and embraced Will tightly "We're alive" she breathed into his neck.

She felt Will give a small chuckle into her shoulder, "Yeah, just

barely" he remarked as he pulled away.

Eleanor took both her and Will's state in. They were covered in dirt and mud from the cliff, and Will's short brown hair was now covered in a layer of dust.

She chuckled at the sight, she reached up and ruffled his hair, helping some of the dust disperse. He tried to swat her away with a smile on his face.

He looked at her straight in the eyes and asked quietly "Are you ok?" he asked.

Eleanor nodded her head "Yeah, I'm ok, just sore" she remarked as she move her hands towards her back. She could feel that her dress was ripped from where the creature had swiped at her.

"Let me see" Will said suddenly as he moved to look at her back, she let her hand fall so that her friend could take a better look.

He sighed, "Well", he started "Your dress is ruined, but he barely nicked your back, just a small scratch", Eleanor sighed in relief, it felt as if the creature had done some damage, but at least it was nothing.

Eleanor went rigid as she looked around suddenly as she thought about the creature, she turned her head left and right, where had it gone?

As if Will read her mind he spoke "No fog" he stated simply. Eleanor took in her surroundings, he was right, there was no fog, which meant, no creatures. She let out the breathe she didn't even know she was holding.

Eleanor looked at Will and saw exhaustion written all over his face, and she could feel it too, her body ached and her eyes were heavy from exhaustion. She looked around once more and saw that there was a small cave dug out by years of erosion from the sea.

She stood up and held her hand out to Will, which he took and stood shakily. "Let's stay in there for the night, then we will decide what to do next", Will nodded as they both made their way to the small cave.

It wasn't deep, but it was cover and they both desperately wanted to sleep without feeling like something or someone would sneak up on them in the night.

They both laid down facing one another, giving each other enough room to sleep. "Goodnight El" Will whispered as he closed his heavy eyes, Eleanor let out a long yawn as she whispered back "Night Will" and with that sleep took them away from the night's terror

Author's Note's:

I apologize for some of the cheesiness and rushed pace of some of this, especially with them saying good-bye to Joyce, I'm anxious to get to this next part of the story which is what I really wanted to write about and hope will be the best part so far.

Love getting reviews and feedback!

5. Meeting

Chapter 5: *H.M.S The Hawk*

This chapter ended up being a little longer, but I HAD to get the other boys introduced and get some Mileven in this chapter too!

Please Enjoy!

Eleanor felt her eyes start to flutter as the sun shone brightly into the cave her and Will had occupied for the night. She could still hear the crashing of the waves and the cries of the seagulls who were casually gliding along with the ocean air.

She sat up slowly, and rubbed the sleep from her eyes. She looked over to Will who was still fast asleep. She smiled, she was happy that he was safe, that they both were. But, at that thought she thought of Joyce, and even of her father. She frowned, *what happened to them*, she thought.

Eleanor decided to walk out of the cave and look around. She hesitantly poked her head out and looked left and right to see if there was anyone near. As far as she could tell, it was just them, she sighed in relief.

"Good morning" Eleanor turned to see Will stretching and yawning as he too rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

"Morning" Eleanor whispered as she continued to stare out at the ocean, a past time that always seemed to calm her.

Will walked up next to Eleanor and he too took in the sight around them. "It's beautiful" he whispered. Eleanor lifted a corner of her mouth in a half smile, she hummed in agreement.

She felt her stomach growl in hunger, she blushed a bit at the sound, Will turned to her and chuckled "I'm hungry too, let's see what mom packed us" he stated as he made his way to the seabag he had managed to hold on throughout their whole ordeal.

He opened the bag and pulled out a water jug filled with fresh water

and a loaf of bread and a wedge of cheese. "Let's eat in moderation" Eleanor started. "We don't know what's going to happen next, so we need to be careful with our food".

Will nodded as he reached deeper into the bag to find a shiv his mother had packed into the seabag. He cut them each a slice of bread and a healthy piece of cheese. They both chewed their food silently, savoring each bite. Each of them taking sips of water along the way.

Once they finished their meal they sighed in contentment as they continued to watch the sea in front of them. Will spoke first, "So, what's our plan?"

It felt like a loaded question to Eleanor, what were they supposed to do? She thought back to what Joyce said last night "*The fog hasn't reached the harbor yet, you can still get out of here*".

"The harbor" she stated simply, Will turned to her confused "The harbor?" he asked confused.

"Yes, we need to get on a ship" she stated matter of factly.

"But, how?" Will questioned, "There's no way they would just let us come aboard a ship".

Eleanor thought on this for a moment "What about ship boy's?" she asked thoughtfully.

Will chuckled at her statement "El, no way, if you haven't realized it, you're a girl" he stated simply gesturing to her.

Eleanor nodded and rolled her eyes at the boy "I know that" she spat at him. "And girls aren't allowed on ships" Will continued.

Eleanor quickly swatted him "You don't think I don't know that genius".

Will rubbed his head and frowned in mock anger "Then what do you propose we do then?" he asked the girl matter of factly.

Eleanor sighed as she passed the thought back and forth in her head when she finally stated "I'll become a boy then" she whispered as she

stood suddenly.

Will stood up quickly with her "What do you mean?" he asked hesitantly.

"I mean, I cut my hair, and dress as a boy, it can't be that hard can it?" she looked over at the boy, waiting for approval.

He looked down at his feet and shook his head "I don't know El, what it you get caught?"

Eleanor smiled at the boy, "Then we will figure it out as we go, but I've lived with a boy my whole life, I know how to act like one" she knocked their shoulders together.

Will smiled again and nodded "Okay" he said, "Let's give it a try".

Will gave Eleanor some privacy as she changed into one of his outfits his mother had packed for him, thankfully they were roughly the same size. She wore a pair of brown breeches and a white billowing shirt in which she topped with a blue vest. Her dress was ripped and tattered anyways, so she left it deserted in the cave.

For Eleanor, it was like she was leaving a piece of herself behind, but she was ok with that. She was ready for a new beginning.

She marched out of the cave and placed her hands on her hips, "So, what do you think?" she asked grinning widely.

Will smirked at her cockiness but examined her nonetheless, after he circled her a couple of times he gave a thumbs up "I think this might actually work" he stated.

Eleanor smiled as she felt the wind pick up her long brown hair, her smile vanished as she knew what the next step would be.

She gripped the shiv tightly in her hand, Will looked at her "It'll be okay El" he smiled reassuringly, Eleanor nodded.

She shakily raised her hand as she pulled all of her hair into her left fist, she made a quick motion with her right hand as she felt her hair

being cut off.

She brought the mass of brown hair in her right hand to her face, she played with it a bit, brown, just like her mothers. She took a deep breath and let the hair fly into the wind. She turned and gave the shiv to Will "Okay, you have to finish it" she stated as she stood in front of him.

"Okay" he breathed nervously, "Let's hope I don't butcher you" he chuckled.

Eleanor only rolled her eyes as she felt Will pull at her now short strands of hair and cut them closer to her scalp. She sat silently as she watched pieces of her hair float by in the ocean breeze.

Eleanor and Will made their way to the harbor walking along the beach, splashing in the cool ocean when they got too hot.

Eleanor actually had to marvel at her now short hair, it was much cooler than her thick long locks that she had just a few hours ago. She had to admit that Will had actually done a pretty good job. She was able to look upon her reflection in a small tide pool, she marveled at the fact that she actually looked like a boy.

"Now" Will started as they trudged along the sandy beach "You have to remember to *act* like a boy, and don't go all girly either".

Eleanor laughed at the comment "I don't act *that* girly" she challenged back to the boy.

Will suddenly stopped and Eleanor stopped puzzled to see what her friend was doing. She watched as Will stood on his tiptoes brought his arms in real tight and began to shriek in a very high pitched squeal "Ewwww, Will, Papa, there's a spider in my room!" he managed to mock Eleanor.

She rolled her eyes at the boy but smiled nonetheless at his acting performance. He continued on "I'm too afraid to deal with a miniscule arachnid that doesn't even want to hurt me!" he cried.

Eleanor bent over, laughing, at his high pitched squealing, "Hahaha,

okay Will, I get it!" she shoved at him fairly hard, knocking him off balance as he fell into the sand below laughing the entire way down.

He pushed his way off of the sandy shore as he watched Eleanor walk ahead of him. He sprinted to catch up to her, flinging the sea bag over his shoulder once more.

Eleanor noticed that he started to distance himself from her for some reason, walking directly behind her, watching her earnestly. She stopped suddenly and turned towards the boy, "What are you doing?" she asked curiously.

Will sighed and scratched his neck "Well, I was, uhm, watching, you, uh...." he started slowly, Eleanor rolled her eyes "Spit it out Will!" she demanded.

"Walk!" he finished as he flinched back, expecting to get a hit from Eleanor. She furrowed her brow. She shook her head, "Why were you watching me walk?" she asked flabbergasted.

"Because" Will began, "You walk differently than boys do".

Eleanor continued to give him a confused look "What do you mean?"

Will walked in front of her and exasperatedly swayed his hips side to side, "I do *not* walk like that!" she stated shocked.

Will turned and laughed, "Yes you do, all women do that for some reason" he shrugged his shoulders.

Eleanor shook her head, "Then how *am* I supposed to walk?"

Will continued to walk in front of her again, this time, his hips barely moved. Eleanor noted that his walk was much more straight and upright, "*Shoot!*", she thought desperately, "*I do walk differently*". Eleanor bit her lip in thought.

Will turned back around to look at Eleanor who now seemed rather scared, he hadn't meant to do that to her.

He walked over to her and placed a hand on her shoulder, she looked up at him "It'll be fine El" he cooed, "It's just a small thing, no one will

even notice".

Eleanor sighed, "But that's just it Will", she began as she continued to walk, Will falling in beside her, "There's going to be a lot of things I will have to be careful of".

Will placed an arm around her shoulder "But that's why you have me, I'll be there to protect you" he smiled at her.

Eleanor smiled back at him feeling comfort in his presence. She looked down the coastline to see that they were not far from their destination.

She could begin to see the many ships that were docked at the harbor, their sails pulled up tight into the riggings, as the ships bobbed up and down from the churning waves.

As they came closer to the ships, both Eleanor and Will marveled at the sheer size of them. They tipped their heads back as their eyebrow wide and mouths dropped open, taking in the marvels around them.

They made it to the gangplank which they climbed quickly, as a new excitement and nervousness swirled about them.

There were at least twenty large ships anchored to the docks and a handful of small merchant ships docked between them.

"So...what now?" Eleanor asked Will hoping he had an answer. He seemed unsure, which frightened Eleanor a bit.

Will sensed her unsettledness next to him, he turned towards her and lifted his mouth in a half smile, "Don't worry, we said we wanted to be ships boys, so, now we need to find a ship that's looking for some."

Eleanor nodded as she let out a breath and walked alongside Will as they took in the sight of each ship.

They were unimaginably large in Eleanor's eyes, she marveled at their beauty. "*They must be the Kings ships*" she thought to herself.

She read the names of the ships as she passed by, there was the "*Dauntless*", the "*Mond Adem*" and the "*Promessa*". Each ship just as

intimidating as the men aboard, who barked out orders as they moved about restocking their supplies.

Will noticed that one of the smaller merchant ships was less preoccupied. There was a man dozing in a chair by the ramp leading onto the ship. *Not a very good watch guard.* Will thought to himself as they approached the man.

Eleanor looked at Will hesitantly as they slowly encroached on the slumbering man. Will hesitantly poked at the man "Excuse me?" he asked quietly.

The man let out a grunt and swatted at Will's hand. "Uh, sir?" he asked again.

The man growled as he brought his head up, blinking his bleary eyes at the two of them, "Whaddya want kid?" his voice gruff.

"Uh, my friend and I were wondering if you were looking for any help on your ship?" Will asked hopefully.

The sailor stood and towered over them, "We ain't lookin for no help, specially from two snot nose kids who don't know better than to not wake a sailor!" he bellowed at the kids. "Now, SCRAM" he yelled aiming a kick at the two, who retreated quickly.

"Well, that didn't work" Eleanor stated solemnly as she kicked at the ground beneath her. "We just gotta keep trying" Will said trying to keep their spirits up.

As the afternoon dragged on Will and Eleanor attempted to approach numerous ships, even though some were kinder in letting the two down, it didn't help their spirits. One ship was looking for some help, but only from one of them. Eleanor almost insisted on letting Will go alone, but as he stated "No, we do this together or not at all".

"Will this is useless, we aren't going to find a ship that will take us" Eleanor stated. "We will El, don't worry, there has to be-" Will started before he was roughly shoved out of the way from a boy a little older than them made his way by, shouting "Out of the way!"

Will fell to the cobblestoned ground with an "Ow" as he rubbed his

arm that had knocked harshly against the stones.

Eleanor turned to the fallen boy "Are you okay, Will?" she asked concerned.

"Yeah" he winced as he stood gingerly, "What's with that boy anyways?" he asked curiously.

Just then about three more boys came running behind them as well, "Yeah, the last one on the harbor, they're looking for some new ones!" Eleanor heard one boy cry as he ran past them. "It's a warship too!" Another cried.

Eleanor turned to Will excitedly, "Let's follow them, I bet they're talking about a ship that's looking for some help!"

Will only nodded as they both took off following a good distance behind the boys. They huffed along as they made their way further and further down the harbor, passing ship after ship along the way.

After a good ten minutes of nonstop running Eleanor watched the three boys in front of her make a sharp turn towards a dock, in which a much larger ship than the rest in the harbor, appeared.

Eleanor took in the glory that was this particular ship, she noted that it had three larger than life masts positioned neatly across the length of the ship. And each mast had four sails neatly wrapped until the ship was ready to make way. She also noticed that there was a fairly large group of boys around her and Will's age grouped around a gentleman who was wearing a neat uniform.

The boys around them were arguing and shouting about trying to get the attention of the man standing before them, Eleanor noticed that he did not look impressed.

Thinking he wasn't going to say anything, she watched the man raise a hand to the group of boys and yell "Silence!" quickly and deftly across them. The boys silenced immediately.

He looked upon them with narrowed eyes before he spoke, "As I guess you have heard, we are currently looking for some new recruits to join our fine ship", the group of boys gazed at him in wonder,

Eleanor and Will doing the same.

"We hired a good amount of sailors yesterday, but today we are looking for some shipboys to join our ranks as well" he said. Eleanor could feel the excitement begin to rise around her from the other boys.

"But!" he raised a finger, "We are only in need of four boys at the moment, so we would-" he attempted before he was interrupted by a boy with curly hair boy shouted with his hands around his mouth "I know how to splice a line!" he placed his hands down to his side, a smile across his face.

The man huffed in annoyance but nodded his head, "Alright, come aboard" he waved his hand to the boy, who, excitedly pushed his way through the now, very annoyed group of boys who began to shout profanities at the chosen boy.

The curly haired boy didn't seem to care as he walked up the ramp to board the ship. As soon as he did so, the whole group of boys seemed to begin shouting out that they could splice a line as well, or they made attempts to make them seem like they knew what went into running a ship.

Being at the back of the pack put Will and Eleanor at a disadvantage, and with the boys shouting every which way and that, would make it impossible for them to be noticed. Eleanor looked around quickly and noticed that the ship had two lines hanging loosely by the side, she got an idea.

"Will follow me!" she whispered quickly to him as she pulled at his arm. Will was much more agile than Eleanor since he had put a lot of work into farming, he was stronger than he looked.

Eleanor waited until they were both high enough for the man to see them. She held onto the rope tightly between her legs and had one arm wrapped around the rope as well. She placed two fingers of each of her hand into her mouth, took a deep breath and blew. A loud whistle erupted between her lips, silencing the mob of boys who turned to look up at her and Will.

The man looked up at them as well, looking slightly annoyed that they had made their way up onto the side of the ship. Eleanor remembered that before she spoke she needed to make sure her voice didn't come out too girly, so she attempted to lower it a bit. As she was about to speak though, she couldn't think of any attributes that made them stand out from these other boys she fumbled a bit, but Will saved her "We can read, and write!" he exclaimed a little too enthusiastic for her liking.

She turned towards Will giving him a look of as to say, "*Really?*" to him, he shrugged his shoulders, but his smile never left his face.

The boys below began to snicker at the two of them, "How's tha' supposed to help on er ship!" a young boy shouted up to them as the laughing grew louder. Eleanor squinted the eyes at them, she did not like to be made fun of, so she spoke "We can climb lines as well" she gestured to the two of them who hung against the ship. "Betcha' boys can't do that!" she taunted.

The man at the front looked at them for a moment before he sighed and nodded, "We are looking for a helper for our teacher on the boat, perhaps the both of you would work out well, and yes, you climb those ropes with ease" he paused.

"Come aboard, both of you" he waved his hands to Eleanor and Will, who, both shocked, could only open their mouths in shock.

"We haven't got all day, move it!" the man shouted at the two frozen kids.

Eleanor and Will made their way down the ropes with ease as they pushed their way past the group of boys who were now aggressively pushing and shoving them along the way. Eleanor didn't have a care in the world, they had done it, they had made it onto the ship.

As they approached the man he nodded his head to the boys as he gestured for them to walk up the ramp "Mr. Kirk is the ships keeper, he will add both of your names to the log".

Both Eleanor and Will made their way up the ramp where they were

met with a glorious sight. The ship was fairly immaculate. The wooden deck shined from the sun, the men were dressed in pristine uniforms and they all moved about in a way that communicated: structured.

Both Eleanor and Will were shaken out of their stupor when a man at a small wooden desk asked "Names?"

Will turned to the man first, "William Byers" he told the man as he jotted it down neatly with a quill in his hand. "Age?" he asks, "Just barely 12, he states. "Very well, you are now written into the record of his ship and, as such, you are now bound by all rules that pertain to members of the Royal Navy. Should you wilfully disobey any of these rules or Articles of War, you will be punished by imprisonment, flogging, or hanging, do you understand?" Will gives a little shiver, but nods nonetheless. Mr. Kirk turns to look at Eleanor, "Name?" he asks.

Eleanor opened her mouth, she was about to give her full name "El-" she started stopping, looking wide eyed at Will, "*Stupid!*" she thought, how had they forgotten to think of a name?

"El, what?" the man asked harshly, clearly wanting to move on with his day.

Suddenly, Will calmed and smiled at her "Elliot, why are you hesitating?" he asked, pretending to be annoyed as well, giving her a small wink.

Eleanor smiled, it was perfect she turned back to the man "Sorry, my friends call me "El" for short, but my full name is Elliot Brenner" she lied smoothly.

The man just nodded in return, "Age?" he asks "Twelve" she states quickly. "Okay, same thing I said to this kid about being a ship's boy, I'm not repeating myself".

El nodded her head as she moved back towards Will, they moved out of the way of the other men as they waited to hear what their instructions were.

She smiled excitedly at him, "We did it!" she whispered, he smiled and nodded in return. El noticed the first curly haired boy over by the side of the ship as they decided to make their way over towards him.

He must have heard them approach as he turned and gave them a toothless smile, El was surprised to see this. "Hello" the toothless boy stuck out his hand towards Will first, "The names Dustin", El noticed he had a slight impediment when he tried to announce his "S's".

"William" Will stated shaking the boys hand, "But call me, Will" he smiled back to the boy. Dustin turned to El next, she shook his hand as well "Elliot" she started, "But everyone calls me "El".

"Well it's nice to meet you both" Dustin remarked as he leaned against the side of the ship. "I've been trying for *weeks* to try to get on one of these bad boys" he said as he patted the railing behind him.

"The monster attacks are getting bad, kids like me on the street are easy targets" he remarked sadly.

El and Will looked at each other, they hadn't really come up with a cover story, but just by looking at each other they knew to just go along with Dustin's.

"Yeah, same here with us" El started, "We lost some friends and decided to high tail it out of here" she motioned throwing a thumb behind her shoulder.

Dustin nodded to her remark as he suddenly looked up towards the ramp of the ship. El and Will followed his eyes. Another boy had came up the ramp, an excited smile on his face as well.

He was talking do Mr. Kirk, most likely giving him, his name and age, El thought. As the boy finished he looked around the ship until his eyes landed on the three of them, he made his way over.

El took in his dark skin and eyes, he seemed to have a bit of a skip in his step now being on the ship.

"Hey!" he raised a hand to the three of them, they all returned a "Hi" in return. Dustin put his hand out first as introductions were made.

"The names Lucas" the boy stated. El took him in, his clothes were ragged like Dustin's, and she looked at hers and Will's, they were a little too clean to have come off the street, hopefully they wouldn't notice.

Lucas, Dustin and Will were chatting about as El continued to turn her head in each direction, marveling at the ship and the sailors, until her eyes landed on the ramp again, she noticed, another boy had walked onto the ship as well. But, he seemed a little more hesitant than the rest of them.

She noticed that an older man held his shoulders as he talked with Mr. Kirk, the boy looking down the whole time. After the man was done speaking to Mr. Kirk, he turned his son around got down to his level and it looked as if he was giving him a deep speech.

The boy nodded along listening to his father, but not looking him in the eyes. The man stood, gave his son one last pat on the shoulder, and left down the ramp. The boy just stood there, obviously unsure of what to do next.

El couldn't take her eyes off of the boy, he looked about her age. He had dark onyx hair that was shaggy and moved in all different directions, he slowly shuffled further onto the ship.

El didn't know what drew her to him, so she made her way towards the boy slowly.

He still had his head down when she approached him, she hesitantly placed a hand on his shoulder and said "Hi".

He turned to look at her quickly, he moved his hand to wipe his eyes quickly, *he must have been crying*, El thought.

"Uh, hi" he stated back, El unsure of what to do introduced herself, "I'm Elliot, but everyone calls me El" she said to him.

He finally looked at her face, they were fairly close, and she took him in, he had freckles that danced across his nose and cheeks and his eyes were a rich ebony color, her eyes widened as she absorbed him, *cute*, her inner voice said, in which she immediately shook away.

He seemed to be taking her in as well, but he finally gave her a small smile as he stuck out his hand, "The names Michael, but most people call me Mike" he said.

El took his hand and gave him a genuine smile, she took note that she liked the feeling of his hand in hers, "It's nice to meet you Mike" she said, struggling to not pull out her girlish charm.

They stood awkwardly about for a moment before she grabbed his arm and started to pull him towards the other boys, "Come on, you should meet the others" she said enthusiastically.

El managed to drag Mike to the boys and the introductions were made. They all seemed to connect well and quickly.

However, they found out soon that Mike's father had paid for him to join this ship. He was supposed to be a Midshipman, but their family had been struggling financially and they only had enough for ship's boy.

He looked down as he explained this, seeming somewhat homesick. El nudged his shoulder gently and he looked at her, *those eyes*, she thought to herself, she got lost in them each time. "Don't worry Mike" she started, "We will all look out for each other", he nodded and gave her a toothy grin at her remark.

Dustin came up behind all four of them squishing them together. El was pressed against Mike's chest at the impact, she blushed. "That's right boys!", "We're one big family now" Dustin remarked holding them.

The boys fought to get away from the boys grasp, but El only smiled, she could definitely get used to this.

YES! Finally got the other boys introduced and able to get some Mileven in there as well. Next chapter they will be setting sail as they learn the inner workings of the ship, and their friendship will grow as well. More Mileven to come as well!

For fun: The two ships names that I included stand for "Mouthbreather" and "Promise" to add some fun in with Stranger

Things references.

I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack.

Please Review! :)

6. The First Day

First I want to give a shout out to Frostburn243, Sephila815, AliKattt, and Starla Marie Locke, who have given reviews which I very much appreciate. I know it was a long build to finally get Mike and Eleven together, but it's like I said I had to build the story from somewhere before I got into the full breadth of the story. I'm somewhat following along with Bloody Jack, but not fully, and doing it a little differently.

I'm also going to be going to be trying out doing El's perspective as well, so I hope that it is a nice change from third person.

So, here's chapter 6, there will definitely be some Mileven fluff as well!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack.

Dustin had finally released the boys from their grasps, in which they began joking and jeering at one another. She couldn't help but notice that Mike was still a little quiet, taking everything in. He held his bag close to him, almost like a safety net.

El turned and looked out towards the ocean, and watched the waves crash and swirl around the boat, that's when she realized she had a problem.

She needed to use the bathroom, and blanked on the fact that men and women used the bathrooms differently. She looked at Will who was now talking with Dustin and Lucas, she gave him a strained and fleeting glance. He noticed this and furrowed his brows.

She mouthed to him "bathroom" as discreetly as possible, Will's eyes went wide as he nodded his head in understanding. He placed a hand on Dustin's arm and asked "Where's the bathroom on this ship?" he asked.

Dustin raised his eyebrows, "How am I supposed to know?" he shrugged his shoulders.

"Actually," Lucas began looking between the boys, "I kinda have to go too" he muttered.

Dustin nodded his head "Yeah, I guess it wouldn't hurt to at least know where it was".

Dustin turned his head, looking about the ship, when his eyes landed on a sailor who was coiling a rope with steady hands. The boy smiled and looked at the other boys, "One moment" he said holding up a finger to them.

The boys watched Dustin approach the man, El noticed that the sailor seemed a little annoyed that Dustin was disturbing his work, but El watched as he stuck his thumb behind him and muttered some words to the boy. Dustin bowed his head in thanks and approached their group once more.

"What did he say?" Lucas asked the boy curiously. Dustin gave the boy a small smile, "Well, he said we could piss in our hats, but since we didn't have any, there's a head at the back of the boat" he gestured behind him.

The other boys chuckled at what Dustin reiterated to them, El tried to not give a face of disgust, as she turned and followed the boys towards the back of the ship.

They steadily made their way down a set of stairs where El noticed there were four well spread out holes and a metal trough as well. *Great*, she thought, she would have to figure something out, and soon in order to keep her identity as secret as possible.

She watched as each of the boys approached the metal trough, she had a small smile on her face as she watched each of them give a small dance before they began their business.

El was a little grateful that each boy took up the places at the troughs, so she waited silently behind them, waiting for them to finish. She was a bit annoyed that they began making crude jokes about one another, she placed a hand over her face and shook her head back and forth.

The boys finished up and they all turned to leave, El was going to take this chance to use the bathroom, waiting for the boys to leave, when, of course Mike turned to her, "Uh, want me to wait, so you don't have to find us alone?"

El would have sighed at his sweetness, but this was not the time and moment for her to recognize that. "Uh.." she started not knowing what to say.

But suddenly a hand behind Mike grabbed him, "Oh, come on Mike, Elliot's a big boy, he can finish his business on his own", it was Will who winked from behind Mike.

Thank God for Will, she thought to herself as she smiled at the boys, "I'll be quick, don't wait up for me" she waved. She watched the boys go before sighing, being able to have her own privacy.

Once El was finished she raced back up the stairs and spotted the boys talking to an older gentleman, he was dressed in a fine blue jacket that was adorned with golden piping.

She approached from behind, Mike noticing her return gave her a small smile, she sighed to herself, she was never going to get over this boy.

El turned her attention to the man in front of them, seeing if what he was saying was important for them to listen to.

"Now, each of you boys will be assigned a mess kit if you don't already have one" he started leering over them. "And, it will come out of your pay".

The boys groaned, none of them had come prepared with a mess kit, that was until El noticed Mike shuffle a little bit as his face turned red. She looked at his bag, *he's probably got one*, she thought.

After that, the man turned and left the boys, who began heading towards the front of the ship. El followed but asked, "Where are we going?"

She expected Will to answer, but Mike being beside her answered

instead, "We're heading towards the kitchen to get our meal, before we head out".

El watches him as he talks, and takes in his words, but she can't help looking at his face as well, admiring every freckle painted across his nose and cheeks. She can feel herself blush, but tries to shake away these feelings that keep wanting to bloom inside her.

She shakes her head at herself, *No, I can't be thinking like that!*, she yells to her inner voice. She calms herself down as they make their way into the kitchen.

As they take in their surroundings, El notices that it is very dim inside the mess hall, only two windows let in the natural lighting. There are candles placed at each table, slowly melting into worn wood.

The boys approach the chef, who is on the heavier side, covered in what El presumes is sweat and grease from cooking all day. Dustin is the first to approach the man. "And what do we have today good sir?" he asks with some cheek.

The chef sends him a small glare as he rolls his eyes, "Fresh horse steak and biscuits, same just about everyday" he grumbles. "Where's yer mess kit boy?" he asks.

"Uh, we don't have any...sir" Dustin adds. The chef mumbles to himself as he moves away from his station, and into his small kitchen. He reappears with four very rusty tin plates. He sets them in front of us. El's suspicion of Mike having his own mess kit is proven true when he pulls out a neat and shiny metal tin from his bag and holds it out.

El resists rolling her eyes at him for being so shameful in having something they do not. It's not like she didn't grow up in a nice home, where food wasn't scarce.

El and the rest of the boys grabs one of the metal tins as the chef places a steaming hunk of steak onto them, the grease oozing from the plate and down El's arms, she shivers at the contact. A biscuit is placed into her other hand.

The boys and El find a place to sit and hunker down on their meals, she watches as Dustin and Lucas ravenously attack their steaks and biscuit. El doesn't like the fact that she doesn't have utensils, but she will have to survive. She decides to try the biscuit first, but stops as she sees other sailors at the table begin to tap theirs against the table.

She watches in disgust as she sees some weevils and worms shake out from the bread. She shivers and does the same to hers, she watches, trying to not show her horror, as insects begin to fall from her bread roll as well.

She sighs, as she slowly picks away at her biscuit, examining each bite before placing it in her mouth. She looks across the table where she sees Mike with the same look on his face as well. She chuckles a little, he suddenly looks up at her and their eyes meet.

He gives her a small smile, which she returns. "Well, I guess, we'll just get used to it", he mutters so only she can hear, she nods her head in agreement as she attempts to take a bite into her steak.

It's super greasy, so as she takes a bite, the said liquid dribbles down her chin and down onto her neck. She wishes she had a napkin, as she is sure she is making a fool of herself in front of a very handsome boy.

The said boy only chuckles again as he has attempted the same thing and has the same problem, El only shakes her head in amusement, as they silently share this moment together.

They have finished their meals and are talking quietly amongst one another, sharing stories about how the monster attacks have started to become more frequent and much more devastating. Will and El exchange worried looks with one another. They hadn't realized how bad the situation really was.

They're cut short with their conversation when a sailor beside them turns to them and says, "Don'tcha be worryin' about no monsters, not while we're on this ship" he mutters to us. We all look hesitantly at one another.

The man gives a low chuckle, "Look ere', we're on the *H.M.S Hawk*,

one of the Kings most mightiest ships, we've already tried attacking the nest once-" he started when Dustin interrupted him suddenly.

"Nest?!" he asks, suddenly seeming a little nervous, as do the other boys.

"Don't be interrupting a sailor who's talkin' to you boy, not unless you want to be flogged" he shook a big meaty finger in Dustin's face, who nodded quickly.

"But yes, a nest, in a center of a giant storm" he began to tell the kids. "Thas' why we been 'ere so long, needed repairs".

"Repairs, for what?" El asked hesitantly taking in the man.

The man sighed and shook his head, "Well, we tried to take on the nest, but lost a lot of men to it" he stated solemnly.

"We barely made it out with our own lives, Capt'n wanted to take a breather, sent a letter to the King, now, we are merely protectin' the boarders from small monsters and pirates too" he stated.

"Pirates?" Dustin whimpered, "Small, monsters?" Will asked hesitantly. The man nodded his head "Aye, and that's why we needed so many new men, the King wants us to start training a new, need to be ready for the next attack on the nest".

"What do you mean attack on the nest?" El asked curiously.

"Well, we tried with three other ships, to get to the island where it seems like these monsters are comin' from" he started.

El nodded as she listened intently, "As of right now, as we keep sending ships to fend off some of the monsters, it seems to cut down the attacks on land".

"So, the King decided to take some of his largest and strongest ships and prepare them, and leave his smallest ships to give us some time to prepare" the man finished as he took a bite of his biscuit.

"Wait, so you mean we're one of those stronghold ships?" Lucas asked concerned.

The man smiled at the boy "Course', we are actually the only ship whose made it in and out of the storm alive".

"We're training up for as long as possible, so we can face the true beast" the man said waving his fist about triumphantly.

The boys all had wide eyes as they looked about at one another, they had no idea what they had just signed up for.

The boys and El were taken out of their somewhat panicked state when a low warble of a whistle made its way heard from the deck of the ship.

The kids looked around curiously as they watched the men around them stand up, some stretching and other moaning and groaning.

Unsure as to what to do next, El turned towards the sailor who had been speaking to them, "Um, sir?" she started as he turned back towards her, "What did that whistle mean, and what are we supposed to-" she was cut short as the sailor placed a hand in front of her face, stopping her words.

"First of all, you don't be callin' me 'sir.' You be callin' me Raleigh, Foretopman, Rated Able, and if we can stand the sight of each other in a few weeks, you can call me Jake. You say 'sir' to the men in the fancy uniforms, and you don't say anythin' to them at all unless they talk at you first, and when you have to talk to them, you look down at the deck and put your right knuckle to your forehead and say, 'Beggin' your pardon, sir'. And you never lifts your hand to them or you'll be flogged or hanged", Jake gives them all a quick look, to make sure they've understood him.

"And second of all, we're gettin' fed early 'cause we're sailin' with the tide", he finishes as he stretches too and follows the other men up to the deck.

El shouts a "Thank you!" towards his disappearing form, in which he raises a hand in understanding that he had heard her.

The boys follow the men up to deck, as they watch in amazement

how quickly the men move about the ship flawlessly and with practiced ease.

The boys run over to the edge in excitement and look down towards the ocean, they hear a shout from high above "Raise anchor!" they look up to the Foretop where El picks out Jake, looking about the ship, making sure everything is set.

"Away we go!" another officer shouts, El and the boys look up to the large white sails, which quickly catch the wind, she feels a sharp pull, which unsettles her footing, she staggers back, and collides with a body.

"Oof", she hears behind her, she turns suddenly "Sorry!" she musters quickly, hoping it's not a high ranking officer, she feels herself relax, though, as she turns her head to meet a familiar smiling face looking down at her.

"It's all good, El, just watch your footing" Mike says as he steadies her with both hands on her shoulder. She revels at him, and smiles back, she flutters her eyelashes at him, and he gives her a curious glance.

Stupid! She thinks as she pulls herself away, continuing to flutter her eyes as she rubs at them, "Sorry, got something in my eye" she lies.

Mike is still looking at her curiously, but nods in understanding, turning back towards the railing, resting his crossed arms against the rails.

El pretends to continue to rub at her eyes for a moment more, but then comes to copy his position next to him.

They are all looking down the side of the ship, watching as the shore and their home begins to move away. El begins to feel a little sad as she watches her home, where she grew up, where Joyce still was, start to fade away.

But then she turns back and looks towards the three boys behind her, all grinning ear to ear, and shouting in excitement. She then looks forward and her eyes rest on Mike, his dark hair waving against the breeze, she sighs in contentment, *I guess I could get used to this*, she

thinks to herself, as they head out to sea.

El's Point of View:

We are all salty sea sailors now, having survived our first days at sea, if only just barely.

The first day out was absolutely glorious, as we rode the tide out to the mouth of the harbor, the sails going up and our banners spanking against the ocean breeze, the *Hawk* slowly made her way onto the sea.

The boys and I aren't exactly sure what to do next, so we just watch in amazement and try our best to stay out of the way of the hard working sailors.

I notice that the sailors are yelling all kinds of strange orders like it's another language, but I'm marveling at the newness of it all.

I let myself take in a long, deep breathe and revel in the smell of the salty sea, it's nothing like town that smells of sewers and rubbish. I realize I'm happy to take on whatever happens next.

That is, until we clear the calm waters of the harbor and hits the open ocean and the ship leans sickeningly on on its side and I slip and fall down and the boat stays like that for awhile, until there is another barking of orders and the ship lurches to the other side.

I can begin to feel the steak and biscuit in my stomach doing somersaults, I feel the color drain from my face, as I lean over the side of the ship and rech up what's in my stomach.

The other boys come up to me, Will is patting my back, and rubbing it soothingly. I can barely look at them, without feeling like I need to empty my stomach. But, after looking at them, I can see that they are feeling exactly as I am. The color is drained from their faces as well. I guess they have stronger stomachs than I do, I think to myself, as I feel the rolling of the waves, and lurch over the side again.

I stay there for awhile, truthfully unable to move. Will has stood beside me the whole time, I don't want to look up and see if any of

the other boys are still there, I honestly don't care at this moment.

As I continue to lay against the railings, I feel a hand on my shoulder, I slowly turn my head, thinking it's Will, but even through my bleary eyes, I can see it's Mike.

My heart does a weird fluttering sensation, I'm definitely happy to see him, but frown that he has to see me like this. But, he smiles at me and rubs my shoulder, he reaches out his other hand in which I can see he is holding a tin cup.

"It's water", he states, noticing my look of curiosity at the tin in his hand.

I give him a quick smile, and I slowly reach my hand to grab the tin cup, I tentatively put it towards my lips and I take a small sip.

It feels good against my raw throat from retching so much. "Thanks" I'm able to muster to the dark haired boy, he grins back at me, "No problem" he states, he stands close to me, as Will does on my other side.

With them both pressed to my side, I feel comfort, and a soothingness that only my mother and Joyce were able to give me as a child.

The steadiness helps ease the motion of the ship and I feel myself close my eyes and relax.

The boys make their way to the mess hall to have dinner, I don't feel like emptying my stomach anymore, but I'm not willing to risk it. So, I sit and watch the boys dig into their second helping of steak and biscuits.

Night soon looms over the sea, the stars twinkling against the dark sky. My body has somewhat come to terms with the rolling of the ship, but all I want to do is sleep.

We are out on the deck, and I notice the boys are looking around, Dustin lets out a long yawn, I'm sure sleep is on all our minds.

"Where are we supposed to sleep?" Will asks the unspoken question,

"Ya'll sleep in the gun deck" and gruff voices comes from behind us. We all whip around to a man standing close to our group.

The man has a determined look on his face, one of his eyes is swollen and black and blue. He is dressed in a not fancy, but not a sailor uniform either. He wears a dark get-up, and El notices a switch at his side which his hand brushes as he looks over their group.

He answers their unspoken question "Name's Johnston, the Bo'sun of this ere' vessel" he state. "If you's make's any trouble, you's be answerin' to me" he shoves a thumb into his chest.

We all shake our heads in understanding as Will grabs my shoulder and whispers "Let's go" to all of us. He doesn't have to tell us twice as we quickly make our way towards the gun deck.

As we enter the deck we see the other sailors are setting up hammocks. Dustin asks one of the sailors if there are some for us, in which he just laughs in his face, "Ship's boys sleep there!" he points to a pile of blankets that are tousled in between two canons.

We sigh, but don't say much because we are all exhausted, and all I can think of is lying down and settling my stomach.

I notice that Mike raises his nose a little bit at their current setup, but he knows he can't say anything, he watches as Lucas and Dustin settle for the ends, so he makes his way towards the middle and settles close to Dustin.

I watch, unsure as to what to do, until I feel Will give me a nudge from behind, he gives me a small smile and wink, as if he knows something I don't. I give him a quizzical look, as he answers my question by settling next to Lucas, leaving a spot for me in between Mike and Will.

Will settles down and quirks an eyebrow at me, I roll my eyes at his cheekiness, but I soon find myself squished in between Mike and Will, just like up by the railings.

I feel my body tense as I try to relax, but I also feel nervous about the situation. I'm laying on my back, but I want to turn towards my left

side, but I know that's where Mike is. I sigh in frustration, as I listen to Dustin give out a loud snore, knowing he's dead to the world.

"Hey, El?" I hear from my left side, I open my eyes a little and turn my head towards the voice. "Yeah" I whisper back.

He says something, but I can't hear him, since he's trying to talk low. I decide to shift to my left side like I wanted to do so earlier, but since Mike is trying to talk to her she thinks it's ok.

"Can you say that again?" I whisper, as I hear Mike rustling, getting even closer to me. His breathe is on my face, and I count my lucky stars that it's dark, so he doesn't see the blush form on my face.

"Sorry, I was asking if you were homesick" he asked again.

I sighed, "I guess a little" I said sadly. I heard Mike sigh as well.

She felt herself become curious and asked, "What about you?".

Mike took in a breathe and said "Yeah, I miss my mom, and my sisters".

This peaked my interest, "Sisters?" I asked.

"Yeah", she could hear Mike smile, "I've got an older sister, Nancy, who's off to finishing school and my little sister, Holly, she's almost four".

I smiled at his enjoyment of talking about his sisters, she didn't have any biological siblings, but she had counted Will as her brother since childhood.

"Will's been like my brother", I spoke softly to Mike.

"That's nice that you have him here" he said, almost a little jealous.

"Very lucky" I muster, I think on my next words carefully, but I take a breath and say them anyways, "But, I'm happy to have you guys as well", I look towards him, from the little moonlight shining in and my eyes being adjusted to the dark, I can see his eyes searching mine.

We look at each other, only seeing the light of each other's eyes. "Thanks, El" he whispers, I watch as his eyes become heavy, and close as he drifts off to sleep.

I smile, still watching him a bit as he sleeps, but I can feel my eyes grow heavy as well. I stay on my side towards Mike, happy to have met such an amazing boy to share this time with. I feel myself smiling as I drift off.

Hope you all liked this chapter! Lot's of Mileven fluff as promised! Hope you enjoyed El's perspective as well, let me know what you think about it!

PLEASE REVIEW! LOVE the comments!

7. Assignments

Thank you once again for the wonderful reviews! And also thank you for the advice as well! I will definitely be doing some more perspective from other characters, but mostly sticking to third person. I will also be adding some more Stranger Things characters as well, I have them all lined up in my mind and can't wait to introduce them!

Also, they will be steadily growing up throughout this story as well. They are all starting at 12, some already close to 13 and they will continue to age as the story goes. In this chapter they have been out to sea for a couple of months already, just so everyone knows.

And I'm breaking the chapter into parts about what goes on, on the ship, kind of like Bloody Jack does so there is an understanding of how a ship is run etc.

So, here's chapter 7!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of View:

As the morning light begins to shine in through the port windows, and the shrill of the Bo'sun's whistle breaks apart the quiet morning, the boys and I rub the sleep away from our eyes.

My stomach is still reeling as we continue to head out further out into the sea, the waves are as choppy than ever.

We have yet to be given our assignments, so I decide to lay low in our little kip and pray that I don't get sick again.

It's around mid morning when, through my haze of sickness that I notice Mike has come down and sits in front of me. I slowly sit up, crossing my legs in front of me.

I notice that he is holding a bowl and a roll in each of his hands as he pushes them towards me.

"You need to keep your strength up" he states as I grimace at whatever is in the bowl.

I see him frowning, "It's just broth, and a roll, if you can manage" he says.

I sigh scooting forward and taking the bowl from his hands, I'm not sure if I can muster the roll just yet.

I scoot back to the blankets and sip at the mildly warm broth, it does feel good in my mouth to have something other than the taste of vile against my taste buds.

Mike smiles as I sip slowly at the broth, I give him a meager smile in return, still not my full self. He continues to watch me as we sit in silence.

As I finish the bowl, he reaches forward again taking the bowl away from me, our hands brush slightly, and I secretly enjoy the small touch, "Thank you" I say, laying back down.

Mike gives me a small nod, "No worries, Will and the other boys are eating in the mess room, and I figured you would enjoy the company".

I stare at Mike and take in his words, his company is always more than welcome in my book and I enjoy any moment we get together.

So, we sit and chat with one another for awhile, he asks where I come from. I think quickly telling him that Will and I met on the street in England and that the monster attacks were so bad, we had to get away.

Mike frowned a bit at my cover story, I knew he felt bad for each of us, believing that Will and I came off the street and knowing full well that's exactly where Dustin and Lucas had come from. He doesn't know Will and I had a pretty decent life, aside from my father.

Soon enough the other boys come back down and join us in our little kip, Mike, Dustin and Lucas are joking and horsing around, I take this moment to whisper into Will's ear our cover story, so that they will match if any of the boys ask again. He nods at the quick and easy

story.

The rest of the day goes by and I'm starting to feel better, the broth did help settle my stomach, I smile at Mike who continues to horse around with the other boys. I don't think I could have gotten more lucky.

Third Person

Finally after a week of being out on the open sea, the boys and El have finally adapted to the rolls and waves of the sea. None of them getting sick again, especially El.

They are all called up on deck and they are told it is time for church. "It's Sunday already?" Dustin says suddenly as we watch the men around us get the ship into order.

"It's Captain Inspection day as well" a young sailor walks by the group of boys carrying a wooden crate.

"Inspection?" El asks looking about at her and the boys.

"Yeah, inspection, to make sure the ship is in working order" the young man says placing the wooden crate towards the front of the boat.

We all nod as we follow the boy like ducklings following their mother. After he is done with his task he turns to see them all looking at him, he gives them a small smile, "So, your five are the new ship boys?" he asks.

The boys nod at him, "The names Jonathan, Midshipman" he states. He has long brown hair tied up into a ponytail behind his head. He is decorated in black pants and jacket, wearing a white undershirt and a black neckerchief is tied around his neck.

El has taken notice that the rest of the men are finally dressed as well, Midshipman are all wearing the exact suit as Jonathan. The sailors are wearing white pants, blue shirts with flaps on the back, and blue neckerchiefs that are tied around their necks. The head officers are adorned in the best blue and golden piped jackets, with

shell white pants. They all wear tricorne hats that are set just right on their heads.

The boys and El introduce themselves to Jonathan as he takes them all in. "Well, better get to your stations, Captain's coming out soon" he gives them a small salute as he heads towards his station.

"He seemed nice" Will states watching him walk away. The kids all nod in agreement.

Another low whistle cuts through the crowd as each sailor, officer and work upon the ship stands at attention.

El and the boys move back towards the railing, they too stand at attention, however, as they have practiced they place their right knuckle to their brow and they look down.

The boys have yet to barely catch a glimpse of the Captain, El has noted that it seems as if he spends most of his time in his cabin.

She looks up out of the corner of her eye and watches the Captain come closer to her and the boys.

She can hear him tutting and muttering about how certain divisions are not well kept and she hears him promise that next time they will be keelhauled if he sees them out of line again. There is a muttering of "Yes, sir's" throughout the division as the Captain moves on.

Finally he stops in front of the small group of ship's boys and observes them, not one of them looking up.

"At ease" they hear him say, the boys lock their legs together and look straight ahead. El does a quick once over of the Captain, he is decorated in the finest clothing and stands out from the rest. His vest and overcoat are the deepest velvet blue, lined with golden buttons and fancy piping. His pants are the creamiest white, with not a spot on them. He looks over the boys with narrowed eyes.

"So, these are the new boys?" he turns and asks his First Mate Powell who stands behind him.

"Yes'sir" he states, also giving the boys a once over.

"What are your names boys?" he asks moving his head up and down their line.

None of the boys speak, too nervous to be speaking to the Captain.

El hears the Captain sigh, "I'm not going to ask again, NAMES!" he barks.

The boys and El jump at his sudden bellow, but El takes a deep breath and speaks first, she brings a knuckle to her brow as she was taught, "Sir, my name is Elliot Brenner", she takes a step back.

She watches as the Captain nods and turns to Will who is next to her, he too takes a step forward, repeating El's actions, "Sir, William Byers", he steps back as the rest of the boys follow through.

"Michael Wheeler, sir", "Dustin Henderson, sir", "Sir, Lucas Sinclair", the boys finish as the Captain nods to each of them.

"Well, it's good to have you boys aboard, the names Captain Jim Hopper, you will address me as either, Captain Hopper, or sir, do I make myself clear?" he asks.

The boys give a tentative nod as he moves past them. The group of kids let out a breath, happy to be passed the inspection.

El turns and looks down the row Captain Hopper had just taken, she notes that he has a gruff demeanor, but there's something soft within him as well, she smiles at the thought.

After Captain Hopper has finished his inspection, church is had on the boat. The preacher of the boat comes to stand on the main deck upon the box that Jonathan had placed earlier. Songs are sung and some prayers are recited.

El takes it all in, as she and Will had attended church every Sunday with her father and Joyce, it makes her feel as if she is close to home.

El's Point of View:

Our Duties:

The boys and I are finally given our assignments. Will and I are to switch on and off working with Mr. Clarke, the Professor, whose job is to teach the midshipman, who are apprentice officers.

Will helps with the morning set-up of the tales, chairs and writing slabs and I switch midday and do the clean up. We each get to work with the men as well with writing, reading and arithmetic.

I'm happy to be working with Mr. Clarke, so I can keep up with my schooling as well. Mr. Clarke is a small little man, his hair balding from his scalp to the side of his head, while he wears a bushy brown mustache.

He's a kind man, and I enjoy being in his company, as do the other boys. For, since we are still young, we have classes as well together.

The other chores I have include the morning scrubbing of the deck which I do with Mike and Lucas. We are all unsure at first of scrubbing the large deck. But, we found slipping and sliding and raising across the deck quite enjoyable.

It's Mike's and mine's turn to race across the quarterdeck, we lean down, our hands on our brushes, as Lucas holds a bucket of soapy water ready.

"Ready to lose Brenner?" Mike mocks me, I scoff at him, "You're the one who's going down Wheeler!" I state back.

We both turn forward looking at Lucas, "Ready, set, go!" he yells as he dumps the bucket across the deck.

Mike and I dash off as fast as we can against a slippery deck, we laugh as we make our way across the deck.

I feel my feet slip here and there, but I keep myself as grounded as possible, I look over to Mike, who's staring back, we are both laughing.

But, this doesn't last long when I hear an "Oh, no" beside me, I turn and it happens quickly. Mike has tripped over his brush which sends him flying forward, right into my path, "Mike!" I yell, I can't stop because of the water and soap beneath me.

I see his eyes go wide as I crash into him, I fly forward and onto him as well, we continue full speed across the deck, until we hit the other side of the ship with a loud "Thud".

I groan as I rub my head that collided with Mike's, I look down to see him beneath me, he's rubbing his head as well.

Taking in our position, I can feel myself blush, I don't believe Mike has noticed yet because his eyes are still closed. He reaches his arm down to push himself up and closer to me.

He does it so quickly that we knock heads again, "Ow!" we both exclaim.

"Watch it!" I yell, as we both sit up.

Mike finally opens his eyes and looks at me, "Well, you shouldn't have been bent over me" he mutters.

I huff at him, "If you weren't so clumsy, and fell into my path, I wouldn't have crashed into you!" I seeth into his face.

We are in each others faces, glaring at one another, when suddenly Mike's mouth begins to pull into a smile, I feel mine doing the same.

Then we are both laughing, "Did you see how far we slid!" he exclaims, "Like, halfway across the ship!" I answer back.

Our laughing dies down, and I study his face as he continues to chuckle, I can't help but study his freckles, they're like stars.

Mike turns to look at her, studying his face, he gives a peculiar look, "Uh, you can get off me now", El looks down and sees that she's been straddling his waist this whole time, if her face wasn't red before, it was now, *he must think I'm such a creep!* I think to myself.

I hastily try to get off of him, still slipping attempting to stand, I manage to get to my feet when I see him stick out his hand, he smiles at me, and I can't help to feel relieved as I reach down to pull him up.

We slip here and there as we try to hold onto each other steadying ourselves. Mike hooks his arm over my shoulders as we slowly move

across the wet deck.

"I call a rematch tomorrow" he grins over to her. She chuckles "Anytime, anyplace" I say back as we make our way back towards Lucas, I marvel at the feeling of Mike's arm around my neck, I silently hope he never takes it away.

Practicing at Arms:

Captain Hopper wants to make sure we are prepared for any attack, whether it be monster or pirate alike.

When we Beat to Quarters, which means we are getting ready to fight or practice, us ship's boys have to run up to the main deck as fast as possible.

Being the smallest of the boys, Officer gives me a snare drum, which I take with greedy hands. The rest of the boys are powder monkeys, which means they have to run back and forth during a battle carrying heavy sacks of gunpowder to the cannons.

I thankfully get to watch from the quarterdeck and I stand next to Captain Hopper and his First Mate Powell, who bark out orders.

The first time I came to stand next to Captain Hopper, I couldn't help but feel intimidated by his mighty demeanor.

After standing by his side waiting for the other men to get ready, I can see out of the corner of his eye that he is watching me, which is making me even more tense. Then I see him give a small smile.

I feel a sharp patting on my back that nearly knocks me and my snare drum over, I steady myself as I hear Captain Hopper chuckle, "Relax boy, there's nothing to be afraid of", he shakes his head.

I only nod and manage a small, "Yes'sir", as he turns to face the rest of the men.

I listen as Captain Hopper and Master Powell give out orders across the deck. I'm watching my group of boys, trying extremely hard to not let out a laugh.

It's nearly impossible to watch the feeble boys attempt to carry the large and very heavy powder bags back and forth across the ship.

I let out a small laugh as I watch Dustin attempt to throw one over his shoulder, and it is so heavy, it crushes him to the deck.

Captain Hopper sighs next to me, "Henderson!" he yells, which startles me a bit. I watch as Dustin manages to roll out from underneath the bag of powder, while he stumbles to stand. "Yes'sir", he yells a hand to his forehead.

"Lift with your knees kid, don't let that powder bag power over you, or you'll be dead before you know it!" Captain Hopper yells to the boy, who nods and tries to lift the bag again, this time succeeding as he places it behind him, he slowly staggers to the nearest cannon.

El can't help but sigh as she watches the other boys, who are struggling just as hard. Will and Mike half carry half drag their bags across the deck as fast as they can. While Lucas attempts to carry his most of the way.

Captain Hopper shakes his head in worry, "We've got a long way to go, don't we kid?" he looks over at me with a half raised lip.

I give him a small smile in return, nod my head and say, "Yes, yes we do". I continue to watch as the men load and fire the cannons, over and over again, till everyone drops to their knees exhausted from the days practice.

I watch as the boys stagger towards me, Dustin holding up Lucas and Mike holding up Will.

"You're...lucky...you don't...have to...do that" Dustin pants gesturing towards me and my drum.

I smile at the boys as we make our way down towards our kip, the boys are out the second their heads hit the blankets.

"Boys", I mutter to myself watching them sleep as I make my way towards the mess hall for a quick dinner.

The Watches

In addition to everyone's daily duties, we stand watches as well, one in three, which means that the ships crew-officers, men and boys- is up on deck throughout the day and night, ready for anything to happen. It's on a rotation schedule as well.

For us ship's boys our job is to run errands for the officers on watch, whether that be going to fetch some coffee or rustling the next men for watch.

Mike and I have the same watch, which, I silently squealed like a girl inside once I heard our match ups. He seemed happy as well.

So, for a handful of hours throughout the night, it's just Mike and I, which I always enjoy.

We spend our fair amount of time running this way and that fulfilling the errands of the men about the ship. But we usually get time to just spend together.

Sometimes we will sit at the head of the boat, each with a cup of coffee in our hands as we whisper back and forth.

I've noticed that Mike talks a lot about home, he tends to get homesick pretty quick, but I try to quickly cheer him up, "You have to remember that you've got a family here too" I say to him.

He sighs, "I know, I do count you, Dustin, Lucas and Will like my family, it's, just hard sometimes" he says as he looks up to the stars.

I give his shoulder a light nudge with mine and he pushes back, we silently smile at one another, as we lean against each others shoulders. I wish every time he does this that I could lean my head on his shoulder, but I take the closeness we have now and wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

My Sea Dad

Each of us ship's boys get with an experienced sailor to teach them the things they need to know, like how to splice a line, how to tie

knots, how to sew and mend and row.

These men aren't exactly told that they have to pick us up, it tends to just happen naturally.

Will and I seem to have gravitated towards Jonathan, he being young, but knowledgeable about everything that needs to be known while on a ship.

"*Line*, El, *line*. It's line when it's running loose, it's rope when it's coiled up and put away", Jonathan says as he guides my clumsy fingers over the rough rope.

Will and I both work tediously with Jonathan over these seafaring ways, Will picks it up much quicker than I do, I find myself much better with a needle and thread.

I have come to become the boys stitchworker when they've come across a hole in their clothing. They usually come to me with their hands clasped together and down on their knees saying, "Please El, just this one more time, I promise!" they plead. I merely roll my eyes and accept their holed clothing. In all honesty I don't mind patching their clothes, the stitching and mending puts me at ease.

After a couple months at sea, I've found myself once again stitching one of Dustin's shirts, claiming it got caught on a nail on the foretop, and ripping open. I'm just about done mending his shirt, when a solemn faced Mike walks up to me in our kip.

He stops in front of me, I don't look up from my work, but say, "Yes?" to him.

He sighs, "Uh, El, since you're so good at sewing and you're mending Dustin's shirt anyways-" he starts, I huff and look up at him with a look of "*Seriously?*" written across my face.

"What did you do now?" I complain picking up Dustin's shirt from my lap and putting the last finishing stitch in.

"Well...you see...we were in the rigging and a nail-" he starts, before I place a hand up to stop him, "Heard the same story from Dustin" I say wagging his now finished shirt in front of him.

Mike sighs and sits cross legged in front of me, "We were horsing around" he mutters. I smile at him, "That's more like it" I say as I gesture for him to give me whatever it is that needs mending.

Mike shows a toothy smile, "Thanks El, you're awesome!" he says, I blush at the comment but turn my face away as Mike begins to pull at his white shirt.

El turns her head back towards the boy who is struggling to get the shirt off of his head, I've noticed that the boys have begun to grow, *it might be time for some new shirts*, I think to myself.

But as I watch, I notice Mike's stomach, I've seen it along with the boys numerous times, but it seems different, more defined. I can't help but stare, *it must be all those practices with the powder bags*, I think to myself.

I keep my eyes on his chest as he wriggles out of the shirt, I look away quickly as he hands me the shirt.

I notice in the back of the shirt there is a small hole, I wiggle my hand through it and Mike shyly turns his head down.

"It won't take long" I tell him as I ready my needle and thread.

Mike watches me intently as I quickly patch up the small hole. In a couple minutes it's finished and I hand it back to him.

"Wow, you're really good at this" Mike marvels, while I bask in his praise.

He throws his shirt back on, again struggling to get it over his head, I watch him again in awe, taking this small moment to enjoy his body.

Once he gets it over his head, he jumps to his feet, "Thanks again El, we're heading to the mess hall for dinner", he says.

"I'll be right behind you" I say as I begin to gather up my sewing stuff, which I keep as neat as possible.

"Well, well, well" I hear a voice behind me, I roll my eyes, already knowing who it is.

"What is it Will?" I ask annoyed.

"Is it just me, or am I seeing a little something between you and Mike?" he teases.

I feel myself blush, but I don't turn back towards him, even though it's darker on the gun deck, there's still enough light for Will to see my red face.

I scoff, "Pfft, no, what are you talking about?" I nonchalantly play off.

Will finally gets me to turn around, "You *like* him" he teases.

"No I don't!" I'm starting to get flustered and he knows it.

He pokes at her, "You like Mike, you like Mike" he sing songs at her.

I quickly place a hand over his mouth, "Shut up!" I whisper harshly at him, "Do you want the whole ship finding out I'm a girl!?" I shove him away, slightly annoyed.

Will looks down, "Sorry El, sometimes I forget that there are a lot of people around us and I forget that you're pretending to be a boy, to me, you're my sister".

I sigh and walk over to the boy giving him a quick hug, "I know, just be careful with what you say" I say as I pull away.

Will nods his head, but then gives her a mischievous look, "But, you do like him, right?" he presses.

"Oh my god, Will!" I huff as I move past him.

They make their way towards the mess hall where they see their other friends gathered. Mike looks up at her and gives her a small wave.

I freeze in my spot as I begin to feel my heart hammer against my chest. He was the only boy who did that to her. She felt herself get a little queasy, did she like Mike like that?

I looked again hesitantly towards the boy who was smiling that big

smile, where his eyes got big and deep and beautiful. My eyes go wide in realization: I *really* liked Mike Wheeler.

Ok, chapter 7 is done, and I hope you enjoyed it! I wish writing between first and third person was easier. I find myself switching between them without even knowing. So, I apologize for any mistakes there.

I also hope you enjoyed the introduction of Mr. Clarke and Jonathan, there will be more on them to come and other characters as well!

Please review! I hope you are all enjoying this story! I'm enjoying writing it as I go and cannot wait to continuously reveal the story as it goes.

8. Practicing in the Dark

Ok here's chapter 8! I hope you are all enjoying this story! I've been trying to update everyday, but it takes me awhile to actually write each chapter. And even though I feel like I'm writing a ton, I feel like the chapters aren't super long. But, I hope you are still enjoying them.

Thank you for the reviews as always, they keep me going!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

The days quickly turned to months for El and the boys, they were a tight group of friends now. When they were not fulfilling their duties, they spent a fair amount of time up in the riggings, climbing higher and higher up to the tallest masts upon the *Hawk*.

They also spend a lot of their time up in the foretop, laying around and joking with one another. The foretop is a platform built high in the foremast, which is the mast in the front of the ship, it has become the group's second home aboard the ship.

El and the boys lounge around on this particularly hot day, they have been sailing towards the north of Africa, where they have been ordered to protect England's merchant fleet from pirates and the ever growing concern of monsters.

For El, each day seems to grow hotter and hotter, she didn't even realize it could even get this hot. She attempts to lay in the small area of shade that the foretop provides, however, she can still feel the sweat drip down her face.

"Ugh, it's so hot!" Dustin complains, as he places a hand over his face to protect his face from the raging sun.

"Yeah, you got that right", comments Lucas who has his right hand over his eyes as well.

El hears Will and Mike give a grunt in agreement to both of her sides. She smirks at the boys complaints, as she sits up and looks about

them.

Their white shirts are clinging to their sweat drenched chests, she's noticed that with this intense sun they have all tanned quite nicely. No longer pale and white like they used to be back in England.

She remarks as to how red and sunburnt Will had gotten in the mere hours of approaching the warmer climate. She had laughed at his tomato shaded face, as he attempted to hide from the sun for a couple of days until he tanned over.

Now, they were all nice and tan and sunburns were a thing in the past.

El stood and looked over the foretop, she marveled at the fact that in the more than half a year they had been sailing with the height she had grown. No, it wasn't much, but for her, she was able to finally see up past the foretop without having to stand on her tiptoes.

She looked towards the front of the ship where the ship gently rocked against the calmer waves of the coast of Africa. She gazed down to the bowsprit net and smiled.

El turned towards the boys, "Hey, let's go to the bowsprit net to cool down!" she exclaimed as she headed towards the hole to head down.

The boys all sat up quickly, smiles on their faces, "Great idea El!" Dustin said as he too stood to make his way down the foretop.

All of the boys and El, quickly made their way down to the deck of the ship, it had become second nature to them to maneuver up and down to the foretop fairly easily.

Once their feet hit the deck, they bounded towards the front of the ship, Dustin, Will, Lucas and Mike, quickly doffed off their shirts and left them messily about towards the rigging that lead to the bowsprit.

El sighed at their untidiness, but not wanting to stick out, she too doffed her shirt and set them with the boys. She was thankful that her top half was the same as the boys still, however, she knew that wouldn't last long, but she would take what she could get for as long as possible.

She looked out at the bowsprit, which is the long pointy thing on the front of the ship, which was a wide net that spreads out around the front of the ship. The net is there to catch any sailor who might fall off the ship during heavy weather.

Although, the net is rigged there for a serious reason, El and the boys use it to cool off and play about when their duties are done.

El jumps into the net with the other boys, all of them squealing with delight as the waves crash down upon them. They have done this so many times that the salt water no longer stings their eyes.

El grasps onto the net tightly as she looks out into the sea. As they are nearing Gibraltar, the water is turning a stunning clear blue.

She looks at her companions and grins ear to ear in delight as she watches the carefree boys in their most vulnerable moments.

She watches Will, who has grown as she has in height, but also in confidence and familiarity, her heart swells at that fact.

She sees Dustin and Lucas who have climbed to the top of the netting, daring the sea to not snatch them away. They push and shove at each other playfully. She notices that out of all of them Dustin has grown the most in muscle and Lucas the most in height. El chuckles as she sees their hairy legs sticking out from their leggings.

Then she finally looks at Mike, she has tried desperately to not put her full attention on the boy and marvel at him in any way, but she can't help it.

He's different from the other boys, he's always the one to make sure she is doing okay, and he has become a great companion just as Will had become her brother.

He holds onto the net tightly as a large wave crashes around them, she hears him chuckle into the wave.

She loves watching his dark hair get matted by the salty sea as he shakes it from his face, he turns and smiles at her, she returns a small smile back but turns away her face blushing.

El doesn't keep track of the days, Captain Hopper informs them each Sunday what day it is, and that's good enough for her. On this particular Sunday Captain Hopper announces that it is March. El's eyes widen at that thought. She and the rest of the boys had been recruited onto the ship back in July of the previous year, *has it been that long already?*" she thinks to herself.

She also takes into account that Will and her are now 13 years old, her birthday falling in November, while his is in January. She will have to remark on that fact to him later, she reminds herself.

El knows the other boys are almost a full year older than them, for they were already 13 upon registering to the ship, so they must be almost 14 by now, she thinks.

She snaps her mind back to what Captain Hopper is saying and listens intently, the service is just about done, which means he is making his way to the announcements of the day.

"Now, today", he begins to bellow across the crew, "We will be starting some fencing techniques", I feel the boys straighten next to me, I roll my eyes for their excitement.

"The more experienced crew will work together. While the sailors and midshipman will work with the more inexperienced crew" he states looking about his men.

He finally rests his eyes upon us ship's boys, "And for the five young ship's boys here", everyone's eye's turns towards them, which makes El want to shrink away. "I expect for their sea dads or other trained members to help them with training swords" he says.

El sighs a little bit in relief, she wouldn't mind spending some time with Jonathan and Will and not the other large and intimidating men aboard the ship.

"That's all for today, get at it" Captain Hopper mutters as he steps down from his wooden crate and heads towards his cabin.

El hears the boys excited voices around her, "Yes, I can't believe we finally get to practice with swords!", Lucas exclaims excitedly.

"Yeah, it'll be great finally learning all of those fancy movements", Mike remarks as he pretends to hold a sword in hand and lunges towards Will, who follows his lead.

Dustin turns towards El and notices that she seems a little worried, "You okay El?" he asks curiously.

El turns towards him and nods her head, "Yeah, of course, why wouldn't I be?" she gives a half smile to the boy, who shrugs his shoulders in return, turning towards Lucas and pretending to be in a sword fight as well.

El lets out an uneven breath, it's not like she doesn't want to learn, it's the fact that fighting monsters and pirates is an actual event that could happen, and she's not sure if she could face either of them in an actual situation.

"Perry, perry, lunge!" Jonathan motions towards Will who is mimicking his motions with ease.

"Now, block!" Jonathan yells as he swings his wooden sword down towards Will, who is quick and blocks the swing with ease.

"Nice work, buddy!" Jonathan beams at Will who is breathing heavily from the quick footwork and movements, but he smiles widely at Jonathan's praise.

"Thanks Jonathan, you're really good with a sword!" he remarks.

Jonathan rubs his head affectionately, messing up Will's growing brown hair, "Hey!" Will states playfully as he tries to grab at Jonathan, who grabs him into a headlock, both boys are laughing now.

El smiles at their interaction, she notes as to how close the two have gotten with their time on the ship. Will never had an honest male role model for him growing up, so El is happy to see him bonding with someone so special to him.

She has caught them talking together when they both aren't working on assignments, Jonathan has shown him knots and splices so as to

ready him as he makes his way through the ranks.

Jonathan has helped El out a lot too, and they have a good connection, but not one like he and Will have. She can't help but feel a little jealous at the notion that Will has adopted an older brother, leaving her out sometimes, but she doesn't hold it against him.

She looks around the deck and marvels at the skills of the other men on deck, some seem to be natural born swordsmen, while others are still new.

El witnesses Dustin, who is practicing with another midshipman, Steve Harrington, she remembers him saying, "He's so cool!" Dustin had told her. Lucas had also taken a liking to the young man, he stands off to the side waiting for his turn, just as El is with Jonathan. She watches as Dustin, not as smoothly as Will, tries to intercept Steve. But, Steve having more experience, swipes his wooden sword under Dustin's feet, in which Dustin crashes to the deck below him with an "Ow".

She watches Steve laugh, but he reaches a hand out to Dustin helping him up and patting his shoulder, "You're getting there, just need to be quicker" Steve advises Dustin as they get ready again.

El watches them a bit more, but turns her attention to looking for Mike, who is surprisingly working with Mr. Clarke. Mike had taken a quick liking to him within their first lesson. Mr. Clarke, El noted, is a bit of a science fanatic and inventor as well. In which she notices Mike hang off his every word when Mr. Clarke goes into explaining something about science or inventing.

And, to everyone's surprise, Mr. Clarke is actually a decent swordsmen. He told El and the boys during one of their lessons that he had studied swordsmanship in China from when he spent three years there on an expedition.

El marvels as to how quick and steady Mr. Clarke is with a sword, he tends to use Mike's chaotic swings and executions against him. She watches as Mike continues to get tired with his broad swings and breaths heavily, this is when Mr. Clarke steps in and "stabs" Mike, who crumples to his knees in exhaustion.

"You can't use all of your energy in attacking, Michael, you have to remember to use your opponents weakness against them" he explains.

Mike catches his breath and nods, as he stands again, "Now this time, read my movements and don't just hack at me like you're cutting down a tree" Mr. Clarke explains as they ready themselves again.

El is shaken from her observations when she hears Jonathan say to her, "Hey, El, your turn".

She tentatively moves towards Jonathan, as Will passes her the fake sword, he pats her on the shoulder and whispers, "Relax" into her ear.

She nods her head and takes her place in front of Jonathan. She shakily gets into position, as does Jonathan, but much more steadier.

"Now, remember what we talked about, easy movements", Jonathan leads as they circle each other.

El moves hesitantly at first to thrust at Jonathan, which he quickly blocks, "You can't hesitate El, or show me that you're afraid" he says a bit harsher this time.

El furrows her brow, a little annoyed at his comment, she takes a breath as she watches Jonathan move in to strike, she blocks the first blow, and the second, and she feels herself excited, but lets down her guard as Jonathan trips her with his foot, he places the sword to her face, "Yield" he states.

El huffs as she smacks the sword away from her face, she stands glowering at the young man. "You can't let your guard down El" he lectures, El rolls her eyes in frustration.

"Maybe if you went a little slower, I would pick up on it then" she growls at him.

Jonathan gives her a wary look, and Will's eyes go wide in panic, "Don't, talk back to me" Jonathan seeths at her.

El raises an eyebrow, challenging him, "Fine, come at me again" she picks up her sword and gets into position.

Jonathan shakes his head, but he is quickly moving towards her, it surprises El, and she only reacts with little timing.

She blocks and blocks, as Jonathan moves towards her, finally she has an opening and swings towards him, as if he already knew she would do this, Jonathan stomps down on the wooden sword heading towards his feet. It happens so quickly El can barely react as Jonathan maneuvers her, as if they were dancing, so that he is behind her and Jonathan has her locked in his arms, the sword to her throat.

El is startled as to how quick it had all happened, she feels him next to her face, "You need to listen, if you don't want to die in battle, then listen to what I have to say", Jonathan whispers into her ear as she pushes her away.

She stumbles a bit, but catches herself and turns to face the young man, her eyes are burning with unshed tears of frustration, "You need to learn that those monsters, those men, don't care if you're inexperienced, they'll take you first because they know you're weak", Jonathan states towards El.

El tightens her fist, as she looks around, just about every sailor, midshipman and even her fellow ship boys are looking at her. Some with pity, some with looks of agreement to Jonathan's words.

She sees Will looking at her with sympathy, and she sees Lucas and Dustin looking off, as if ashamed, then she turns and looks at Mike, who seems lost and a little embarrassed by her.

She can't take it anymore, she lets out a loud huff as she turns and flees. "El, wait!" she hears Will yell behind her.

But, she's not listening, she heads towards one of her hiding spots in which she had discovered early on in their expedition. It is the one place she can go to be alone from all of the men among the ship.

She tucks her knees up into herself as she wraps her arms around them, holding her close. She lets the tears come freely now as she lets out a strangled sob.

The sobs begin to wrack her body as she feels the pent up emotions

flowing over her. She can't help but feel alone upon a ship that only houses men.

She settles for a moment and thinks of Joyce, and how she would have loved to have her here right now. Whenever she was sad or upset, Joyce would always be there to hold her and brush her long brown hair, telling her that everything would be okay.

El stays in her hiding spot for a good while, she listens to the sea move about the ship and lets her settle her as she calms herself.

"El?" she hears a voice call to her from the darkness of her hiding spot, she doesn't respond, because she knows who it is, he's the only one who knows about this spot.

She hears someone approach her and let out a sigh, "Hey" Will says quietly as he moves closer to her.

"Hey", she mutters into her legs. Will is silent for a moment, taking her in, he sighs again, "El, you don't have to worry about anything", he starts.

El turns her head quickly towards him, scowling, "I made a fool of myself in front of everyone!" she yells, tears pricking at her eyes again, "In front of Captain Hopper, the midshipman, Dustin, Lucas, and....Mike" she finishes softly.

"He must think I'm such a wuss", she snuffles, not wanting to cry again.

Will pats her on the back and then moves his hand in a circular motion, trying to calm her, "El, of course he doesn't think you're a wuss, none of the guys do" he explains.

El says nothing, so Will continues, "They were all worried when you ran off" he smiled at her, "Mike especially" he teased.

She turned her head back towards the boy a tear silently falling down her cheek, "Really?" she questioned.

"Of course. After I ran off after you, he was right on my heels, I knew

where you were going, so I wanted to give you time, and I told Mike that too" he said looking earnestly at her.

El gave a small smile to him, she thought it was incredibly sweet to think that Mike was worried about her. She must have read his face wrong out on the deck.

"Everyone's gone to dinner, no one's going to patronize you El, and, if they do, we'll back you up" Will gripped her shoulder tightly.

El sniffled again, she wiped her running nose and eyes very unfeminely onto her sleeve, Will smiled at the action.

"Ok, let's go", she whispered as she followed Will out of her tight hiding spot.

As they made their way out of El's hiding spot, she noticed that the sun had set across the horizon, it was now a rich blue that cascaded across the sea.

El followed Will closely as they made their way into the mess hall, it was loud and crowded as usual, and as they entered, only a handful of eyes fell on them. El noticed that they didn't say anything to her and she continued on to grab her meal.

Tonight it was some kind of stew, with meat and carrots, and tonight with a slice of thick bread. El held out her tray to receive her meal, the cook placed her meal diligently onto her plate and gave her a little wink, El smiled at the kind gesture.

She waited for Will to grab his meal, he turned towards her and gave her a little grin, she saw that the boys were sitting in their usual spot, so they made their way over.

El hesitated as they got to the table, the boys looked at her timidly, "Uh, hey guys" Will muttered.

Dustin gave them a great big toothless grin as he scooted over to let Will sit down, "Hey guys, nice of you two to finally come and eat" he teased.

El looked at Mike who pushed Lucas next to him to scoot down as well, Lucas rolled his eyes and huffed but moved down.

Mike patted his now vacant seat and gave her earnest eyes, "Sit and eat, El" he said.

El smiled at him as she quietly sat down and picked at her food. The table was silent for the most part, which felt a little awkward to El, but she also didn't mind it either.

The boys chatted idly around her, but she didn't add to the conversation not really knowing what to say. She still felt embarrassed about what happened early and could barely meet the boys eyes.

Suddenly, she felt an arm around her back, she looked up quickly to see Mike smiling at her, "Don't worry about it El, we're all here for you".

El looked at him with wide eyes, she then turned and looked around the table to see the other boys smiling at her as well, nodding at Mike's remark.

She felt her eyes tear up again, but refused to let them fall, she gave them all a wide smile, feeling their true bond between them, "Thank you" she whispered to the boys who had quickly become her new family.

Mike brought her close to his shoulder and gave her a small affectionate squeeze and held her there for moment. She honestly could have died very happy right then and there. She relished in the small moment and refused to let it go, until Mike slowly let her go and he returned to his meal. It was one of the best moments in El's life.

That night Mike and El had the late night watch together. After they made their rounds to the men on watch they met up on the back deck, where no other officer was in sight.

They talked quietly to one another, about their dreams and what they

wanted to do when they got older. El loved listening to Mike tell her about his hopes for the future.

She listened intently as he talked about owning his own ship one day and maybe having a small trading market as well. But what she loved most was listening to how he wanted to marry a nice girl, have a house by the coast and raise a small family.

El hope that someday, that girl might be her. She so desperately wanted to tell him, but she knew she couldn't, not yet anyways.

"You know, I could help you with your fencing" Mike stated suddenly, bringing El out of her dreamland.

"What?" she asked scrunching her face in confusion. He gave her a small laugh, "I said, I could help you with fencing, if you want" he said again this time a little more timidly.

She gave him a glinting smile, "That'd be nice" she said nodding to his statement.

"What about....right now?" he asked, a mischievous smirk on his face. El gave him a questioning look, "What do you mean, now?" she asked hesitantly.

Mike held up a finger as he dashed off, El watched him run off, *what is this boy thinking?* She asked to herself.

Suddenly she watched as Mike came running back up the steps to the back deck holding something in both of his hands.

Her eyes widened as she realized he was holding two wooden swords, he held one out to her as he approached, "Here" he said.

El looked wearily at the wooden sword, she sighed, "You meant right now?" she asked a little displeased.

Mike frowned but he still held out the sword to her, determined, "The best time is right now" he said.

She looked at his eyes and saw the determination in them, "I don't want to see a family member get hurt" he said honestly.

El felt her heartbeat begin to rapidly increase, *he cares and he thinks of me as family!* Her girly voice inside of her head squealed in delight.

She was thankful for the cover of darkness around them, so Mike wouldn't see her blush.

But, she finally reached out and took the wooden sword from Mike's hand and nodded, "Teach me then" she said smiling at the boy who grinned back at her.

They spent the next hour working back and forth, on the more simpler steps, how to block properly and how to read your opponents next move.

They parried back and forth, moving fluidly with one another. El enjoyed the way of how when Mike explained something to her, it was slow and methodical, not rushed and assuming she knew what he was talking about.

She loved Jonathan, but Mike's teaching style was much more her speed and made Mike made her confidence soar as they worked back and forth.

"Ok, now this time, I'm going to move at you, but you have to read my movements" Mike explained as they set themselves up again, El nodding at his request.

She readied herself, Mike moved towards her more quickly this time, and she knew she had to react, to read his movements.

He was faster than her, making her movements a bit more hesitant and unsure, but she managed to block each of his blows.

"That's it, keep it up El", Mike cheered as they kept moving, El smiled at the compliment, but lost track of her surroundings, she tripped over her own feet and fell to the deck with an "Oof!"

She heard Mike chuckle as she sighed, he reached his hand down to her, she took it as he pulled her up. They were standing close, chests heaving a bit, "You did really well that time" Mike remarked staring into her eyes.

She could feel her eyes sparkling back into his soaking up his admiration, she loved feeling this close to Mike, it made her want to tell him so badly.

Their eyes flicked between each others, she sighed, "Mike, I have to-" she began but was interrupted by a coughing behind them, they spun on the spot, eyes wide in fear.

There, leaning on the railing of the steps stood none other than Captain Hopper. The kids stood, unable to move, they were screwed.

Captain Hopper looked at them wearily, "So, one of you want to explain why there's some kind of loud pitter patter moving back and forth, on the roof of my room?" he asked with a bit of a chuckle.

El and Mike both sputtered as they both finally went to attention, bringing their knuckles to their brows and looking down to their bare feet.

"We're sorry Captain Hopper" El started, shivering a bit in fear, "Mike was just helping me with my sorry excuse for sword fighting" she stated quickly.

She felt Mike give her a small nudge, as if to say, *don't just blame yourself!*

"It was my idea, Captain Hopper" Mike stated still looking down, El rolled her eyes at his chivalry.

They heard Captain Hopper give a small grunt as he said, "At ease kids", both El and Mike brought their feet together and looked over towards the Captain, his face hard as stone, El noted how difficult he was to read.

They watched as Captain Hopper made his way slowly over to them, they continued to stay silent and still. He looked over them closely then turned and looked back towards the sea.

He sighed, "Wheeler, you still need to work on those aggressive movements, power isn't everything" he said.

"And you, Mr. Brenner" he began, El felt her mouth go dry, "I see that

you've made small improvements, even from this morning, but you need more confidence in yourself".

He stood with his hands behind his back still looking at the sea, El decided to speak, "You were watching us?" she asked daring a look at Captain Hopper.

She watched as the side of his mouth turned upwards he gave a gruff chuckle, he looked down at her, "Again, it's a little hard to sleep with you two moving about up here" he said with a glint in his eye.

El lowered her gaze a little bit, "Sorry about that Captain Hopper" she whispered, "Our shift is almost done, we'll head back to our-" she wanted to finish but Captain Hopper raised a hand to stop her.

"It's fine kid" he said, "Next time though, just, don't do it above my cabin" he said as he wiped his hand across his face, she could tell that he was a little tired from being woken so soon.

"We will be more careful next time, sir" Mike stated looking up at the large man. He nodded his head in understanding, he took another breath, "When's your night shift?" he asked them.

El and Mike looked at each other curiously, "Ugh, every three nights, sir" El whispered, Captain Hopper nodded his head again.

"Tell ya what, on those nights, after you've finished your rounds, you'll meet me in my cabin, and we'll work on both of your sword skills" he turned and looked at the kids.

Mike and El stared at him, surprised and then at each other, "Sir, are you sure?" Mike asked.

"Course I am, can't have my fine boys here go into battle with poor sword skills" he stated matter of factly.

El and Mike looked down sheepishly, "That doesn't mean you can't be taught" he said.

They both looked up to him, "You kids got potential, I see it, and I want to make sure you are the best you can be if trouble strikes".

The teens nodded at Captain Hopper still amazed by their luck, "Now" he grumbled, "How much longer is your shift?" he asked.

"Uh, about a half an hour" El stated, "Ok then, get back to it, I'll step in when I see fit".

Mike and El looked at one another, Mike shrugged as he picked up both of the wooden swords handing one to El.

They got into their fighting positions and began their movements back and forth, all the while Captain Hopper would call out small remarks to them, "Wheeler, keep your movements fluid", "Brenner, keep your eyes on Mike, not your feet kid".

And this went on for another half an hour before the bell rang out denoting it was time for a shift change.

"Alright, off with you two" Captain Hopper muttered as he turned away from them, "Keep it up, now, I'm off to bed".

El and Mike let out long breaths as they watched the Captain retreat to his cabin, where he hoped to catch some shut eye.

They both agreed it was time for them to get some rest as well, so they made their way down to their kip, aggressively shaking Dustin and Lucas to wake up for their shift.

Once they were up and muttering swears to the both of them, both El and Mike collapsed onto their blankets, they were turned towards each other.

"That was-" Mike started, "Amazing" El finished. They watched each other for a moment before El spoke up, "Thanks...for helping" she whispered.

Mike shrugged, "Anything for a friend".

El watched as Mike began to doze off, she was feeling giddy about the nights events, she was ecstatic that she and Mike got to work with the Captain, she was even more so excited that it was with Mike.

She sighed, wishing she could have had a moment to tell him her secret, *I guess it wasn't the right time*. She thought to herself as she began to doze off into dreamland.

I think this is one of my favorite chapters yet! Lots of Mileven, but also tried to include some Will and Jonathan bonding, along with a Steve and Dustin match up and Mike and Mr. Clarke as well.

Please, Please Review! I always look forward to reading them and hearing your feedback, your suggestions are always welcome as well!

9. A Lesson Learned

PLEASE READ: I have class all weekend so I made sure to get this chapter up before then because I will have no time to write this weekend! So, my next update after this one won't be until Monday, maybe Sunday if I have time :(

THANK YOU FOR THE REVIEWS! They make me so happy! I hope you all enjoy this next chapter!

Trigger Warning: There is some beating in this chapter, nothing really bad or graphic! Just wanted to put it out there!

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things* or *Bloody Jack*!

Enjoy!

Weeks past upon the *Hawk*. They had yet to set eyes on any dreaded monsters or even pirate ships. El could sense the men's antsiness as they awaited some sort of prize to take for themselves. Apparently any head of a monster was worth its weight in gold.

El didn't really care if they ran into any kind of trouble, for she was enjoying her moments on the ship, and she wouldn't change them for the world.

Ever since Captain Hopper had taken on teaching El and Mike the ways of the sword, they had had many nightly endeavors together.

El especially enjoyed these nights because she got to spend them up close with Mike. However, she found she enjoyed the company of Captain Hopper as well. She discovered past his rough demeanor actually lay a soft spoken man.

As Mike and El practiced back and forth with one another, Captain Hopper would grumble under his voice directions or criticisms.

"You're still leaning too much on that left foot El", "See, Mike took noticed and now you're sprawled out on the deck, like a dead rat". El rolled her eyes at his comments and Mike chuckled at her misfortune, as he would always help her to her feet. She found that Captain

Hopper tended to criticize her more than Mike. But, she didn't mind, his voice was never mean or angry, it was more comforting and reassuring than anything.

She found herself getting better each night as she practiced with Mike under the watchful eye of Captain Hopper. She began to understand Mike's movements and read them accordingly as he moved.

El noticed that Mike had a tell of when he would lunge, he had a habit of sticking out his tongue as he was about to strike.

Each time El saw this, she put it to her advantage and was able to dodge his strike and recanter his moves.

She was getting quicker too, and so was Mike. They were becoming much more matched against one another, and this made El smile to herself.

She was much more confident on the deck as well when everyone was out practicing their skills. El began to understand what Jonathan was trying to teach her, especially after Mike's and Captain Hopper's more well explained directions.

Now she could fence against the rest of the boys, she didn't always get them to yield, but she was quickly becoming better than them.

El watched out of the corner of her eye each time it was her time to fight against one of the boys, she would see that Captain Hopper would crane his neck to watch her each time. He always held a bright smile on his face when she would win, and if the boy fighting her was able to win, he would just shake his head and move on.

El was determined to win against the boys each time, she wanted to have the approval of the Captain, she found herself wanting to make him proud.

After the morning of fencing practice, it's the boys time to be taught by Mr. Clarke. A time in which El and the boys all enjoy.

Since El and Will set up and take down the table, seats and boards for the other classes, they are work together to get the classroom set up

for their classes.

Mr. Clarke is always eager to teach the boys, he walks in with a smile on his mustached face and he always greets them with a chipper, "Morning, boys!", in which they all return with a, "Morning, Mr. Clarke", and they set to work.

As the time ticks away, Mr. Clarke works with the boys on reading, writing, arithmetic and some navigation as well. Each of the boys chatter excitedly as Mr. Clarke gives his spiel on navigation, El listens intently, but she enjoys the reading and writing aspect most.

This is due to the fact that Mr. Clarke breaks up Will and El to work with the boys to make sure they are following along and are improving in their work.

Will had "chosen" to work with Lucas and Dustin the first day they set up their class, in which he gave El a smooth smile with raised eyebrows.

She knew he was teasing her for her connection with Mike, but, she also wasn't going to fight with him about it as well. If it meant more one on one time with Mike, then so be it.

Today Mr. Clarke had given them three new words to learn, define on paper and write out in neat lines ten times, today's words were *consolation*, *solace* and *balm*.

El always finished first, her handwriting neat and organized. She showed it to Mr. Clarke, who always beamed at her work and would then conduct her off to work with Mike.

What El loved most about helping Mike was the fact that he hated it. Since he had come from a higher class, he could read pretty good, and his writing was, decent, but El always made sure he did it to his best ability. She loved watching his dark eyes roll at her each time she corrected him.

Today she bent over his paper and watched him intently, purposefully breathing down his neck, attempting to annoy him.

Her mouth curled up as she watched his grip on his pencil get tighter,

it was working.

He stopped suddenly and looked daggers into her light brown eyes, "Do you mind, I'm trying to work" he said with annoyance.

El faked offense as she brought her hand to her chest, mouth open in shock, "I'm just trying to make sure my student is doing his best work" she cooed.

Mike scoffed as he turned back to his writing, El watching intently, waiting for him to make a mistake.

She watched as he began to write out the word *consolation*. But, instead he wrote *consilation* instead. She poked him in the ribs, in which he jumped at and swatted at her hand, "What!" he said gruffly into her face.

El feigned innocence at the boy, "It's just you spelt your word wrong, it's consolation, with an "o" not an "i", she said.

Mike shook his head in frustration, "I don't care, it's one letter", he began to write again.

El furrowed her brows at the boy and poked him again, he jumped, "Would you stop that!" he growled.

El shook her head, "Fix your word Mike", she folded her arms in front of her.

He gave her a hard stare, turned back to his work and simply stated, "No".

Now El's mouth dropped open in shock, now *she* was getting ticked. She poked him again, in which Mike let out an "Augh!" in annoyance.

He turned back to her and pointed a finger in her face, "Knock it off, if you know what's good for ya" he threatened.

El tilted her head, and reached in again to poke him, but this time he caught her finger, "Let's see how you like it!" and that's when he began an onslaught of poking and tickling into El's sides.

She couldn't help but laugh as he berated her sides making her body shake with her laughter. She tried to block his hands, but he was too fast and strong.

"Mike, stop!" she yelled breathless and he continued, he began to laugh at her own expense. "No, now you know what it feels like!"

The other boys now distracted by their fellow ship boy's laughter, watched with amusement. "Get him Mike!" Dustin yelled throwing a fist in the air.

"Come on El, fight back!" Lucas jeered watching the two.

El couldn't contain herself as she tumbled out of her chair and onto the floor as Mike went with her, still attacking her sides with his wriggling fingers.

Mike ended up straddling over El, holding her down, he continued to smile at her misfortune. El couldn't even marvel in the fact as to how close Mike was to her as she was only focusing on trying to get the onslaught to stop.

Finally after her breathing was caught in her throat, she screeched, "Mike, please stop!" her voice came out higher than she meant.

She felt Mike's fingers stop suddenly, and listened as the boys jeering quieted as well. El lay breathing heavily attempting to catch her breath.

She looked up to see Mike giving her a confused look, her eyes went wide in shock.

The silence was broken by Dustin, "Geez El, you sounded like a little girl".

El continued to look up at Mike, she was trying to say anything, her mouth opening and closing like a fish out of water, but now words came.

"Yeah, she sounded like you did the other day Lucas, when Steve scared you!" Will teased, he then stood and mimicked Lucas's expression and let out a loud feminine scream of his own. Dustin

laughed at Will, while Lucas only rolled his eyes.

El sighed, she would never be able to thank Will enough for his always fast thinking, it saved her from revealing her true self more times than she could count.

Will turned back to El and Mike, "Why are you stradling El, Mike, geez" he scoffed.

Mike suddenly jumped off of El, again she marveled at Will's quick wit, turning any awkward situation of herself onto one of the boys.

El layed on the floor her breath finally slowing, when Mike reached his hand down to help her up. He pulled her to her feet, he gave her a small smile.

She sighed, she loved it when he gave her that cockeyed smile, "Sorry about that" he said looking away.

El shook her head, "No, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to take it so far, I just like teasing you" she stated as the boy turned back to give her another grin.

Mike turned back towards the table, where he picked up his pencil and returned to his work. El decided to keep her space from the boy as she sat with her thoughts.

She enjoyed that moment with Mike, the way he held his hands to her side, even though he was tickling her, she loved any time he touched her. She finally had a moment to take in the fact he was sitting on her, bringing him closer to him even still. She blushed at the thought, but kept her face hidden as she leaned her chin on one of her hands. Watching Mike finish up his school work.

Once the boys lessons are done for the day, they bid El, a "goodbye" as she sticks around to set up the classroom for the midshipman.

"El?" Mr. Clarke calls to the girl as she sets down a new clean slate in front of each chair, she turns and looks at the man and says, "Yes?"

"I've got to run to the head, I'll be back shortly", he says, El gives a

short nod as he leaves the room, she continues to place the slates out.

She's just about finished when she hears a roughling of boots head her way, she looks up and sees the midshipman enter the room. Jonathan gives her a small smile, and a pat on the head as he passes. She grins at the contact.

She watches to the side as the other man enter and move about to find a seat. She sees Steve enter as well, this time he is talking to another young man about his age. El frowns as she sees this midshipman, she does not like him.

El has witnessed too many times as to how this young man teases and harasses the other midshipman aboard. He has short black hair that is a bit spiky on the ends, and his face is riddled with freckles. El finds him to be a homely looking man, but keeps that comment to herself.

As she continues to watch them enter the room, their eyes meet, and he gives her an audacious grin, as he makes his way over to her.

"*Stupid!*" she thinks to herself, she never tries to make contact with most of the midshipman if they make no contact with her.

She stays with her hands behind her back, her face solemn as she continues to look forward, she can only hope he ignores her. But, oh is she very wrong.

El feels him get right up close to her, he's got a bit of a swag in his step as he eyes her up and down.

"What do we got here?" he looks her over again, "A little ship's boy, who thinks he's better than us?" he mocks.

El still doesn't move, not wanting to make the wrong move. "What, little boy? Can't speak?" he spits in her face and she flinches at the contact.

She watches as his mouth grows into a wretched grin, she can see his yellow teeth, and shudders. He finally turns away from her, and she lets out a breath, hoping the whole ordeal is order. But instead, the young man turns to the table and reaches out and grabs one of the books they have been studying over.

He brings it to her, "Stick out your hand"he commands with a cold voice.

El knows she shouldn't, but she can't refuse an above officers order. She shakily brings her hands forward.

He opens the book, and places it into her outstretched hand, he points down to the page and breathes his fowl breath into her face, "Read" he commands.

El takes in a shaky breath as she looks down at the words on the page, she takes in a breath and starts to read, "'Of arms and the mans I sing, who forced by fate, and haughty Juno's unrelenting hate..." El doesn't get to finish as the back of the man's hand whips out in front of him and catches her across her mouth.

Shocked, El raises her hand to her lip. "Don't raise your hand to me boy!" he bellows into my face, I close my eyes hard at the sound, I whip my hands down to my side.

"I...I'm sorry, Sir" I whispers, I look around and see that the rest of the midshipman are all watching us now.

The man looks hard into her face, he glares at her, but he's still grinning, he looks down and points to the book again, still held in El's hands.

"What does this mean?" he is pointing at another passage, El glances at it, and whispers, "I don't know, Sir". El feels the inside of her lip with her tongue, it is cut, she can taste the iron of her blood.

He points at the book again, "And this?" he asks a little louder this time, El hesitates, but mutters, "I don't know, Sir".

"You insulate little snot!" he spits into my face again, he leans out to hit me again. El closes her eyes tight, waiting for the impact, this time he catches her across her ear and she is knocked to the floor.

"Get, up!" he growls, as El attempts to stand on shaking legs, her ears are ringing fiercely and the room spins around her. He gets into her face again, "Are you going to cry?" he taunts.

El shakes her head and whispers a "No" to him, even though her tears are trailing down her face and she can feel her nose running as well.

"We'll see about that!" the man cocks his hand back again, when a voice rings out, "That's enough Tommy!"

The midshipman stops his movements and turns towards the source of the voice, El hesitantly peaks her eyes up as well, she can see that Jonathan has moved from his spot and now stands near both Tommy and El.

"What did you say, welp!" he is now in Jonathan's face, but he's not backing down. Jonathan gives Tommy a leveled glare, "Leave the boy alone, he has done nothing" Jonathan states levelly.

Tommy quickly grabs onto Jonathan's lapels and holds his hands there, "Look who's standin' up to old Tommy now" he seethes.

Jonathan pulls Tommy's hands away roughly, they continue to size each other up, Tommy opens his mouth to say something, when Mr. Clarke walks through the door, "Good afternoon, gentleman!" he states brightly.

All of the men's eyes fall on Mr. Clarke, Jonathan and Tommy give each other one last glare as they separate.

Jonathan moves over to me, he shyly moves a gentle hand up to my eyes and wipes at them, he gives me a soft smile, and wraps an arm around my shoulders, he turns his head towards Mr. Clarke, "I'm taking El back to the boys, he's not feeling well".

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, but yes, if he's not well he should not be here, thank you Jonathan", Mr. Clarke says sympathetically as Jonathan walks El out of the room.

El dares not to look around and keeps her head tucked into Jonathan's side, feeling calmed in his presence.

They make their way out onto the deck and down to the gundeck silently, Jonathan moving slowly for El, who is still off balanced by Tommy's strike.

As they make their way onto the gundeck and to the boys makeshift kip, El looks up to see that Mike and Will are talking quietly, resting on their blankets.

They sit up at the sound of Jonathan and El coming across the floor. Will jumps up, concern written on his face, El can't help it anymore as she wraps her arms around Will and cries silently into his chest.

Will looks up to Jonathan with a questioning look as he rocks El back and forth to soothe her.

"Tommy" he says to the boy, who only furrows his brows more, "He was picking on El and...he smacked him across his mouth and ear" he explained.

"What!?" El heard Mike exclaim as he ran up beside her and Will, concern crossing his face. "What do you mean struck her?" he asked.

Jonathan sighed at the boys, "Tommy's just a bully, who targets anyone smaller than him, El was his target today" he said gesturing to the small girl who was buried into Will's embrace.

The older boy smiled though, "He took it like a champ though, I'm not sure you boys would have stood there and taken it like El did", he gave the boys a little wink.

"I've got to go, just make sure he's okay" Jonathan moves away from the boys, as he heads towards the stairs towards the upper deck.

El turns in Will's arms suddenly, she snuffles, "Thank you!" she murmurs, her voice watery from her fresh tears. She watches as Jonathan turns back to them, gives them a small smile and says, "Anytime" as he disappears up the stairs.

El turns back into Will's embrace and holds him close. She feels him rub her back soothingly. "It's okay El, you're safe, you're with us now" he coos trying to calm her.

El relishes in Will's embrace, she has always felt at ease when in his presence. Mike looks at them with some curiosity. El watches as Will gives him a small smile, "You have to realize we're like brothers, we grew up together, and faced a lot of hardship too, we look out for

each other and comfort each other too" Will stated easily.

Mike finally nods his head in understanding, he places a hand on El's shoulder, she turns her watery eyes towards the boy, he gives her that smile she loves, "I'll go get you some water, okay?" he whispers.

El only nods her head, as she watches Mike disappear where Jonathan had just done so moments ago.

She finally breaks in Will's embrace, "It was awful Will" she cried into him. Will rubs her back again, "Shh, it's okay El" he calms her.

Will continues to hold El and finally leads her over to sit down on the blankets, Will sitting beside her. Mike soon comes back baring a mug of cool water. She takes it, and slowly sips at it, she winces as the water makes contact with her cut, but she drinks it nevertheless.

Mike and Will sit beside El as she calms and relaxes into the blankets. Her eyes grow heavy with exhaustion after crying. She feels Mike pat her back, she looks up at him, "It's okay El, you can sleep, we'll protect you" he whispers earnestly.

El feels her eyes begin to water again at the kindness from both of these wonderful boys she is lucky to have in her life. El nods her head at his words as she closes her eyes. She drifts off to sleep, feeling protected by her guardians.

Ah, sorry this chapter is a bit shorter but I know exactly where I'm going to pick up and don't want to continue into this chapter!

So, introduced Tommy into this chapter, needed a villain aboard and thought he would be the perfect candidate.

I love my little pairings starting to come out as well, I hope you are all noticing my connection between Hopper and El ;)

As always, PLEASE REVIEW! They are like candy to me and I love reading each one!

I promise I will have the next chapter up by Monday, if lucky

maybe Sunday depends on my classes!

Thank you all again!

10. Bloody El

Ok, I'm back from my weekend classes which were long and exhausting, so I didn't get anytime to write, so I figured I'd be able to get out the next chapter today!

Again, thank you for the lovely reviews, and I know, Tommy is a jerk, I had to introduce a character and this situation happened in Bloody Jack, so I wanted to incorporate it as well.

This chapter will be a good one, I promise! Please enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of View:

It's been a couple of days since that awful Tommy decided to berate me and beat me up in front of the other Midshipman. I run my tongue over my now healed cut on my lip. It's still a bit tender, but it has healed well. I have also found that even though Tommy believed he was humiliating me, it seemed to have a backwards affect.

I obviously had to continue my job helping set up Mr. Clarke's makeshift classroom each day, but as I swore before, I always made sure that he was there and that I was never alone in the classroom.

However, I've noticed that Jonathan tends to keep a particular eye on me, and keeps me close by, and I appreciate every moment that he does. The other midshipman who are not close with Tommy tend to keep me preoccupied as well, so I don't have to work with Tommy. Although, he does try to get me to come over, when another midshipman tells them they can help him instead.

When above deck, it seems that there always seems to be a member of our small group sticking close by as well.

After I had gotten some sleep the day of the incident, Lucas and Dustin had come and found the three of us laying in our pile of blankets together. They, of course couldn't believe what happened after Will recanted the story. Since then, the four boys seemed to

have come to an agreeance to have someone close by to keep an eye on me.

Today, after I've left the classroom and came up to the upper deck, Dustin is immediately by my side. He gives me a toothless grin and begins to ask me about my day.

I recount my day to him, but I'm also looking around the deck, I see Will tying knots with another sailor, Lucas is swabbing the deck, and Mike is leaning against one of the masts. I can see they are all, "casually" watching us. I smile to myself knowing I have four boys looking out for me. I count my lucky stars each time I have them nearby.

We have long made it through the Strait of Gibraltar, and it's getting hotter by the day. Especially since, as Captain Hopper announces today that July has arrived, which means it's summer, and the heat waves are only going to get worse.

Today I stand with the boys off to the side as we watch today's commencement of church. We are all sweating profusely. I look out of the corner of my eye to my left where Mike is standing, his now longer and curlier black hair sticks out at odd angles. I can see the sweat begin to drip down the side of his face from his forehead.

Out of all of the boys who have been keeping a close eye on me, Mike always seems to be the closest and most watchful of them all. I feel my heart flutter at the thought, as I have thoroughly enjoyed his close company.

I turn my attention back to Captain Hopper, I can see that today he is leaning mighty heavily against his podium. He is wearing his full uniform, which, to me looks undesirably hot and heavy. His face gleams with sweat, as he hurriedly makes it through the sermon.

The midshipman don't look any better with their full black outfits, I count myself lucky that us ship boys are all wearing loose shirts and light pants.

Captain Hopper finally finishes the sermon in record time, I can hear

the whole crew let out an audible sigh, they know that if they are at least moving, they can get moments of shade from the glaring sun.

"I know it's beastly hot out today men", Captain Hopper bellows across the men, "But, today we need to practice our gun drills".

All the men groan in agony, "However, I will not require you to be in full affect since it is just training", Captain Hopper says to the ailing men, who give nods of agreement of the Captain's orders.

I go to move, as I need to fetch my drum from our kip for the drills, when a hand on my shoulder stops me, I turn, "I can grab it for you El", says Mike looking around hastily.

I give him an earnest smile as I shake my head, "No, Mike you need to get to your station, as does Tommy, I'll be fine", I say as I place my hand over his.

He lets out a loud sigh, and pulls his mouth tight, I can tell he's debating, but nods and lets me go.

Just as I figured, no one bothers me as I run to grab my drum and sticks and race my way back up to the quarterdeck. I come and stand quietly next to Captain Hopper, I see he has stripped off his thick blue jacket and stands with a loose white shirt billowing in the wind.

I doff my shirt as well, thankful that I have yet to change in my top half, I wrap my shirt around my waist and stand ready. I can see out of the corner of my eye that Captain Hopper is looking at me and grins.

"Ready, El?" he asks with a dull voice. I nod my head and raise my hands, ready for his command.

I listen as I hear Captain Hopper take in a deep breath and bellows, "Man your stations, get ready to fire!"

I watch as the men, and my boys, move across the deck. I see that the boys have doffed their shirts, as have almost all the men having to move hastily across the deck, carrying heavy loads.

After months of rehearsing the steps over and over again, the boys

and men have finally gotten a rhythm established.

No longer are they bumping into each other like idiots, but now they move in sync with one another, listening to each others commands and working as one unit.

Dustin, Lucas, Mike and Will are also much stronger, they no longer drag bags of powder behind them, but they can now swing the bags up over their shoulders as they run from gun to gun.

I can see their muscles are starting to get more defined, I feel a moment of proudness as I have watched these boys start to grow into men. I take a moment as well as I admire Mike once again, shirtless, as he heaves the powder bags with much more gusto.

I bring myself back to the present as I listen for Captain Hopper's command of "Fire!", in which I bring down my sticks and rattle them against the drum's head. The cannons boom and crack, as the ship sways a bit from the motion. I hold myself steady, unlike the first time this happened, many months ago, where I fell flat on my face from the motion. I can still hear Captain Hopper's laughing in my ear.

We continue the drills, until the boys and men are red faced and breathing heavily. Captain Hopper dismisses us, as the men head back to their duties.

The boys meet me at the bottom of the stairs from the quarterdeck. I try not to laugh as each of their, now longer, hair sticks to them in every which way and sweat pours from them profusely.

Obviously I don't hold back my smile, as they give me glared eyes. "You should have to be doing the drills too" Lucas says folding his arms.

I shrug my shoulders, "Captain's orders" I hum to them, they all roll their eyes, as I see Dustin give me a wild look, I furrow my brows, "What?" I ask him curiously.

"Well, it seems that you're not as sweaty as us, which, isn't really fair, don't you guys agree?" Dustin asks the other boys giving them a "look".

As if they all understand the joke, I see their mouths begin to turn upwards as they nod at one another, I decide to take a step back.

"Yeah, El should be just as sweaty as us" Mike saunters towards her, he begins to move his arms out and I watch as the other boys do so as well.

My eyes widen in fear as I realize what they're about to do, I take in a breath as I try to turn and run, but my drum is still around my neck and I feel one of them grab onto it.

I'm pulled back and I cringe as I'm enveloped into eight arms of four very sweaty boys.

"Ugh, get off me!" I try, but they are all laughing and jeering as they pull me closer, I can feel their sweat stick to me and I shudder.

They finally let me go, and they all look like proud peacocks as they laugh at me. I can't help but feel disgusting, I glare at them.

"You are all disgusting", I seeth at them, "You're fine El, besides we're going down into the bowsprit to cool off anyways", Dustin says as he hooks his thumb behind him.

I try to continue to be mad at them, but I sigh in defeat, and think of how much these boys have helped me and cared for me, so I smile at them, "Fine" I raise my hands in defeat as we race towards the bowsprit net to cool off.

The days continue to pass, and I've noticed that my clothes have begun to shrink on me as I have grown. The worse part I notice are my pants, which have gotten really tight, especially around my waist. I realized that I'm going to have to make a new pair.

One day after the midshipman lessons I stick back and ask Mr. Clarke where on the ship I can access some cloth. He points me to the clerk, Donald Melvald, down in the ship stores, where I can purchase some cloth and thread.

I make my way down to the stores where it is a bit dark and damp, but I look among the barrels and crates with wonderment.

I hear someone clearing their throat to my left and I turn to see an older man, who has a wooden board, paper and pencil, I wonder if he is taking inventory. "May I help you?" he asks, not looking at me.

"Uh, yes, I need some cloth, sir" I ask quietly, watching the man hesitantly, he still hasn't even cast a glance at me.

"You can just call me Mr. Melvald", the old man sighs as he finishes writing something down on his paper, and finally looks at me.

He has white hair and loose skin that wrinkles about his face. He makes his way over to me and gives me a quick look up and down.

"What'chya need cloth for, you've got clothing", he gestures to me.

I hesitate for a moment, but take a breath and say, "You see, Mr. Melvald, my clothes are old and getting a little small on me and-" I start when he raises a hand, in which I stop my talking.

"I don't have time for your story", he mutters as he turns towards the stores, "What'dya need?" he asks quietly.

"Uhm, two yards of white duck", I say as I look at him, watching him gather the material. I gaze at him as I watch him pull out the material and measure it with preciseness and ease. He cuts off two yards, folds it into a neat stack and hands it to me.

I take the material gently from his grasps, "This will go against your wages, boy", he says as he turns back towards his clipboard, surely marking down my purchase.

I stutter as I answer, "I know, Mr. Melvald, it's fine" I mutter. He huffs at me, as he turns back towards the stores muttering to himself.

Unsure, I turn and leave, feeling giddy that I've finally landed my hands on some new material, which means I can finally have a new pair of pants soon.

Within a day and a half, I have myself a new pair of pants. I hold them up to the light where they gleam with their newness and whiteness.

With this pair I've decided to make them a bit looser, so that they are baggy on me and further my Deception. They also have a drawstring which makes it much easier to loosen or tighten them as well.

I find myself proud at my new clothing and show them off to the boys, who merely laugh and jeer at me looking so, "right and proper". I scoff at them and roll my eyes, I don't care, they can have their laugh.

I noticed that my pants match the Able Sailors, and I watch them in their white pants and blue short sleeve shirts and blue hats as well. I find that they all look quite elegant in their rigging, and decide that I will make myself a new shirt as well.

So, I go back to Mr. Melvald, who rolls his eyes at me, but gives me the goods, and within a day I am dressed just as fine as the other sailors aboard the ship.

The boys in the foretop give me cheek and mock my, "boyish" charm, they find that I'm a bit "off" in ways, not super manly like.

I cringe hearing them make these jokes at me, *am I being too girly?* I ask inside me head, instead of flancing about, I find myself withdrawing a bit, resolving to ask Will about it later.

However, my worries and doubt turn around, when it comes to inspection day. I stand in my new outfit, the boys are trying to not laugh at me, but fail miserably, even as Captain Hopper approaches.

I see him look between the boys and then his eyes meet mine, he raises an eyebrow, curious. I see him finally grin though, "Brenner!" he bellows, which startles me a bit, I step forward, he gives me another once over.

"Did you make this suit?" he asks, I give him a bit of a questioning look, but say softly, "Aye, I did".

He pats me on the shoulder and gives me a wink, "Now, this is a fine look, unlike your friends here" he gestures towards the other boys, who aren't laughing anymore, they seem horror struck.

"Mr. Powell" Captain Hopper turns towards his first mate, "Yessir" he

mutters, "See that Mr. Brenner here has enough cloth and thread to make an outfit like his own, for these other boys", he gives them all a wide grin.

I smile to myself as I watch the boys mouths fall open in shock, and their faces turn red in embarrassment.

Captain Hopper gives them all a nod, as he is off to inspect the group next to us. I shrink back into the line next to Mike, I can feel the four boys eyes on me, glaring as they are surely attempting to bore a hole in my head.

But, I raise my head proud, happy knowing that the Captain mostly did this to appease the boys teasing, but also because I believe that Captain Hopper likes his men and boys to look presentable.

After the inspection is over, the boys come over and they all swat me behind the head, I hear Dustin curse as Lucas says, "Way to go jerk", he mutters as they walk off. I can't help but laugh at their misery.

"Hold still, Dustin, I mean it," I say, crossly. To drive home my point I bring my fist up with the measuring tape I'm using to measure the inside of his leg for his pants and I give him a sharp whack where he doesn't want to be whacked.

He howls and holds his hands there, I finish up measuring Dustin without another complaint from him.

We are up in the foretop while I measure the boys for their uniforms, it's not as hot as it has been, and we're basking in the glory of the sun.

"Okay Lucas, your turn", I say as I write down Dustin's measurements, he rolls his eyes and stands in front of me. I measure him and Will next, who too gives me trouble, but it's more so in a good nature way because we know each other so well. I fake a throw to his midsection too, he flinches in fright, but I just give him a good natured grin, and he whacks my head.

Once I'm done with Will, I turn to Mike, whose just as ticked at the

other boys for having to get a uniform. He huffs and stands in front of me, I measure him out, but I take a bit more time with him. I'm desperately trying not to blush with how close I am to him, but I don't want to since I am in front of the other boys.

Even though he is ticked at me he still offers to accompany me down to the stores once again, he states his only reason to tag along is because he's never seen the stores, but I know it's to watch my back. I don't mind since it will be nice to have an extra set of hands to carry the stuff back to our kip.

We're talking quietly down to the stores, but once we hit the stores room, Mike does exactly as I did as his eyes widen and he gazes upon the cargo.

I smile a little at our similarities. I grab onto his hand and drag him towards the counter where Mr. Melvald stands, once again with his board and paper, mumbling to himself. I clear my throat to get his attention.

Mr. Melvald looks up very slowly from his paper, and once he sees its me again, he rolls his eyes and then gives me a little glare.

"What is it now Mr. Brenner?" he asks in a monotone voice.

I list off what I need to the old man, he gathers the materials together, then looks back towards his list, "So, Eighteen yards of white duck, three yards of blue, fifteen feet of white piping, spool of blue and white thread, two needles and a piece of chalk", he says looking back at me.

"Yes, Mr. Melvald," I say nodding my head.

Mr. Melvald turns back to his paper as he does some calculations, I turn to look at Mike, who is carefully running his fingers on the blue material, he then fiddles a bit with the white piping. I hesitate rolling my eyes, *he is always the fidgeter*, I comment to myself.

Mr. Melvald finishes with his calculations, and pushes the material towards Mike and I. We carefully balance the goods in our arms, as we make our way back towards the kip.

I place the material down very gently and begin to place it in an area that I know it will not get dirty or disrupted. The rest of the boys are down here as well, once Mike sees them, he gets all excited and drops his armful of material unceremoniously to the ground.

I open my mouth in disbelief, "Mike, seriously?" I huff at him.

Mike turns back towards me and gives me a confused look, "What, it's not like it's going anywhere", he shrugs.

"I wanted to keep it neat", I grumble as I pick up the now unfolded blue material and piping, carefully folding it once again.

The boys begin to laugh, "Geez El, you better be careful, you're like some bleedin' proper lady or something", Dustin chuckles.

I freeze for a moment at his words, then get myself together quickly, I turn to face them. They are all looking at me now as I'm breathing quick and heavily. I points a finger at them and lay out as many curses at them as I can. In our time aboard this ship, I've picked up some many colorful words from the older men. I tend to not use them accept when necessary, and now seems like the best time.

The boys stare at me in shock when I'm finished, "Just because you boys don't keep after your things, doesn't mean I don't", I huff at them.

"Well, geez, sorry Mr. Grumpy", Dustin mocks in a deep voice, but I can tell my little act has done what it needs as the boys carry on, me joining in after I've got my material put away, neat, just how I like it.

As I sit with the boys, I do think of how I need to watch how I act and behave sometimes, in order to keep up the Deception.

The Deception:

I've begun to do some thinking about how I've managed to get away with the Deception for about a year and a half now.

In the first place, men and boys are used to thinking of females all pink and white and powdered up. However, I am tanned just as much

as the other boys and my knees and hands are just as scratched and scabbed as all the others.

Second, I've found that I read a lot. Mostly in the kip when the boys are off doing their own things. But, for most, when they see someone reading, they think *boy*. Which is fine with me.

Third, I keep my hair cut very close to my head, sometimes I keep it curling just about my ear, but I try to be careful as to how long I keep it. The other boys are all starting to let their hair grow out. They want to be able to keep it tied back in a ponytail, like the other fine sailors on the ship, not me though.

I've come to find myself looking at myself in mirrors that are hung up in the privy. When no one is around, I take a moment to look at myself carefully.

Sometimes I sigh at my reflection, I'll run my hand through my short hair and think of how it used to be long and flowing, just like my mothers.

Even as I begin to fill out, I still look like a boy, and in some ways it frightens me a bit. Even when I decide it's time to leave the ship, will I ever look like a true woman?

I think of Mike, *would he ever fancy me if he knew?* I hope so, but maybe...I don't know.

Then, it seems like some sorry person has wished their absolute worse on me, I'm pretty sure it was Tommy.

It seemed as if everything was going fine in our lives, for I've attempted to accept myself for who I am, and that if one day Mike sees me as a lady, then it would be the best day of my life, but for now everything just went down a deep black hole.

We are out swabbing the deck, we have been moving down the coast of Africa, and surprisingly there have been no signs of monsters so far, but there have been suspicious ships peeking their way in and out near the coast, and they keep slipping away.

I hadn't been feeling the greatest when I had woken up this morning, my stomach was in tight knots. I thought I was going to be sick at some point, but I never felt nauseous. The pain ebbed and flowed throughout the morning.

It's Will and mine's turn on this morning shift to swab the deck, and I'm thankful it's him that spots it and no one else.

I'm working desperately hard on a trying spot on the floor, when I hear Will gasp behind me. I turn to face him suddenly, "What?" I ask hesitantly.

He jumps to his feet and runs over to me, pulling me up and away from my brush and bucket. He is hurrying down the stairs to our kip, "Will!" I hiss, barely following along, stumbling down the steps.

He finally stops and pulls me to the side, "What's wrong with you, if the Bo'sun ca-" I start at him, when Will stops me with one word, "Blood".

I look at him confused, "What?" I ask a little hesitantly.

"El, you've got blood on the back of your pants", he whispers hurriedly.

I whip my head around and look down at my pants, I can see that there are drops of blood lingering there. I look back towards Will wide eyed, "Maybe I caught myself on something", I whisper to him.

"That's why I wanted you to look down here, so if someone else noticed, you'd probably get sent to the sick bay, where the doctor would ask you to-" he stopped and we looked at each other. We both knew if I was sent to the sick bay for a wound close to my waist, I'd be discovered for sure.

I sigh in relief, "Thanks Will, glad it was you and not the other boys, give me a moment?" I ask him as I slip away to one of my hiding spots.

There I am able to take a closer look at what's going on, I'm happy that I have on my old pants from when we first got on the ship and didn't ruin my new white ones.

I look to see if I was caught on something, but then I discover in horror, it's coming from, down there. I can't help but be petrified as to what is going on with me, and then I think to my stomach pains. I hunch over in fear, *I must be dying from some kind of gut rotting disease!* I think to myself.

My eyes begin to water, there was so much more I wanted to do, to see. And now, it's gone, in one moment of sickness. I let the tears come down my face, and I shudder in fear.

After a bit I sigh to myself, I know I have to go back out, but I'm still bleeding. So, I take some old cloth and roll it into a thick pad. I then tie a circular rope around my waist in which I tie to the pad to hold it in place between my legs. I use some water and wash the blood the best I can from my pants and put them back on.

Will sees that I've been crying, "What's wrong?" he asks, and I just hug him, for that's all I want, and he is there to comfort me.

I explain what's going on, and he pulls back to look me in the eyes, "El, you'll be okay, I'm sure it's nothing", he whispers to me as he attempts to console me.

We eventually return to the deck and resume our duties, I can feel a dark cloud looming over me now. I know that I will be dead within a couple days, if that, I think to myself.

I keep my distance from the other boys, Will tells them that I'm not feeling well, and they keep their distance as well saying they don't want whatever I have.

No, no, you don't my dear friends, you don't.

However, a couple days go by and my stomach stops knotting, and the bleeding stops. I feel like my old self again. I marvel as to what just happened, but I put it behind me and hope it never happens again.

The boys and I are sound asleep, curled up against each other, our breathing even as the ship gently rocks us.

TWEEEEEEWARBLEWARBLEWEEEEEE...

We all shoot up from our resting spot, bleary eyed and looking about, I hear a joined, "Ow!" as Lucas and Dustin knock into each others heads.

"Whas-goin on?" I look to Mike on my left, who looks extremely confused, his hair sticking in all directions.

TWEEEEEEWARBLEWARBLEWEEEEEE...

I heard again from the upper deck, it finally registers to me as I look about the boys, "It's a pirate" I whisper, this gets the boys attention as they scramble to their feet and rush to the upper deck.

I go to follow to, but turn around to grab my drum and sticks. As I go to grab them though, I feel myself shaking a bit. I try to take a breath to calm myself, it doesn't really work, so I turn and head towards the quarterdeck, where Captain Hopper is standing.

I can't help but marvel at his state of levelheadedness in a time of chaos such as this. But, I can see, thanks to the many drills, even though the men are shouting and running about, they are doing so in an organized fashion.

It's just barely daybreak, the sun is peeking its head just above the horizon, casting a deep red and orange glow against the blue sky. I marvel at the beauty, but bring myself back, knowing why we are up here.

I look to see that there is a ship just off of our starboard, much smaller than us, with two masts and big swooping sails rigged fore and aft. We've managed in the dark to get between him and the shore.

The burning hulk of the ship that the pirate's just plundered is glowing in the lessening dark. It glows for a while and then winks out.

The pirates must have been so caught up in their robbing and killing that they didn't notice The *Hawk*, sneaking up on them, all dark and quiet.

The pirate ship is desperately trying to get back to shore, now that they've noticed us sneaking up behind them.

There's a strong wind behind us, I look up to Captain Hopper who has a beaming smile on his face, he looks down at me and gives me a little wink, "Alright there, kid?" he asks.

He must have noticed my nervousness, and I can't seem to shake it, but I nod at him in return, unable to speak.

I hear him give out a loud chuckle, "Watch and learn kid, this is how you take down a pirate!" he says excitedly.

I find my eyes glued to watching Captain Hopper as he begins to bark out orders, I watch as the sailors and even my boys, work in a harmonious symphony, Captain Hopper is the conductor.

"All top men aloft to make sail" he yells. Some of the men, the really prime seamen, leave their Quarters stations and leap aloft.

I watch with amazement as the men scurry up the mizzen rigging with ease. I watch as the sails are let loose, and with the wind behind us, they pick up quickly and eagerly, lurching the ship forwards.

"That's it old girl", Captain Hopper grins as he watches his mighty ship bend at their command.

We are in hot pursuit of the pirate now, and I can't help but feel the excitement from around me finally stir my own excitement. It will be our first prize!

The pirates have attempted to put on all sail in attempt to shake us, but we are gaining faster than they can shake us.

Suddenly, a loud boom rolls across the water, and a puff of smoke rises from the pirate ship. The ball sips harmlessly across the water, missing its mark.

"Mr. Powell, give him a shot from the starboard chaser, if you please", Captain Hopper orders.

I watch as Mr. Powell aims the long gun on the right side of the

fo'c'sle. He puts his eye on the sight and looks down the length of the barrel. He brings an ember from a smoking punk to the touch hole of the cannon, the gun roars and slams backwards. It misses its mark.

"Let's have another, Mr. Powell" Captain Hopper orders casually. Mr. Powell's team, which includes Dustin, reloads the cannon at lighting speed. Mr. Powell aims again and fires. This time it hits the pirate and the gun crew sets up a cheer, but the ball only smashes in a cabin wall.

We are getting closer though, only about fifty yards away. Closer. The pirate fires again and the cannonball whistles over Captain Hopper's head and makes a neat round hole in the mizzen sail.

My eyes go wide in shock, okay, this isn't fun anymore, people are *shooting* at me! I think to myself, generally blown over as to how steady the Captain is.

He lets out a breath, "Okay, playtime is over" he states as if he were taking a stroll in a park on a sunny day.

"Mr. Callahan, when I give the signal, bring the ship to port so that the starboard guns will bear. After the broadside, bring her back on this course", the Captain states to the man.

"Aye, sir" says Mr. Callahan, readying himself for the next order.

"Starboard guns," shouts the Captain, "Hold steady, aim your guns but hold steady, fire on my order."

I lift up my now quivering sticks and waits. The Captain looks at Mr. Callahan and nods. Mr. Callahan speaks in a low voice to the man at the wheel and the ship begins to turn towards the left.

The *Hawk*, continues to turn, and turn, "FIRE!" bellows Captain Hopper, and I hammer down on my drum and then there's an awful crash as the guns all roar out as one, and the *Hawk*, herself heels over from the blast.

I listen as the crew bellow cheers, the pirate has been hit *hard*. One of its masts keels over, the gun ports are smashed and one of their sails is dragging in the water.

I watch as I see some of the pirates attempt to vacate the ship in small boats. "Hold fire" Captain Hopper orders.

"Starboard guns, reload with grape. Aim to clear their decks. Fire only on my order" he holds a hand out.

If we are clearing the deck that means we are taking the ship, we will not sink her for we are going for the prize.

The crew reloads the guns, as Mr. Callahan orders the man at the wheel to swing to port again, "FIRE", the Captain shouted again.

Again, I hit my drum and the guns shout out their terrible bark again. The powder from the smoke whips back across the deck, it stings my eyes a bit. I can see though, that we are very close to the ship.

My eyes widen again, as I can see the dead men hanging about the deck, as the sea beneath the ship begins to turn red, I try hard to not be sick on my drum.

Then, there's a splintering crash and I'm up in the air and flat on my back, the wind is knocked clean out of me. There's another blast. Then there's smoke and screaming coming from down below. The pirates guns have fired point-blank into our side.

Although hit, the *Hawk* still moves with ease. Another shot from the pirate hits below again, I can't stand the screaming.

"Man the Boarding Party to starboard," Captain Hopper bellows. My eyes widen in fear as I attempt to get myself up and moving. I am numb with terror. I need to find Mike.

All the men are grabbing cutlasses from the nearby racks. Our Marines are up in the rigging, firing down at the pirates below, keeping them away from the netting.

I turn every which way and that, desperately trying to find Mike. Finally, I spot him up at the front of the mob by the rail, waiting for the order, cutlass in hand.

Idiot! I want to scream aloud, but my feet are moving faster, as I attempt to reach him.

"Away the Boarding Party!" I hear Captain Hopper bellow, "No!" I say aloud this time, I watch as Mike is the first one across the net. My eyes are now swimming with tears and I blindly follow across.

As soon as my feet hit the deck I slip onto my bottom because the deck is covered with blood and there are dead men everywhere.

I attempt to stand, desperately trying to set my sights on Mike, *there he is!*, I think as he is heading aft. I try to follow but slip and fall again, this time over a dead pirate, whose missing his face. I hold in my horror, as I see he has two pistols in his belt, primed and ready for use. I yank one out and head after Mike.

I come around the cabin and spot him, he looks confused, and then next to me the cabin door flies open and a pirate comes out with a chest under his arms and a great curved sword in his fist. Mike doesn't see him as the pirate is heading right towards him.

The pirate raises his cutlass above his head, he gestures the sword down towards Mike.

"*Mike!*" I scream, Mike turns towards his doom, I raise the pistol in both hands and pulls the trigger. The smoke comes back and and flies in my face.

The pirate isn't moving anymore, there's a large bleeding hole in his chest. Mike looks at the pirate then turns to look at me, he's stunned.

The pirate sinks to his knees as he drops the chest, which pops open and gold coins spill out across the deck. The men from our crew begin to scoop up the gold pieces.

All of the pirates are now dead or gone and I'm still standing there in shock. Shakily, I see Mike is now standing in front of me.

He is splattered in blood from the pirate that nearly killed him. I feel him place both hands on my face as he turns it upwards, I barely meet his eyes.

Muffled I hear him ask, "El, are you ok?" it takes my brain a second to catch all of his words, not really knowing how to react.

Mike must have noticed, because now he's looking at me scared and confused because I'm just standing there, shock written across my whole body.

"Come on, let's get you back to the *Hawk*" he whispers. He puts a hand behind my back and leads me to the gangplank, he sticks close as we walk back over.

The men are putting the cutlasses back, and I see them all staring at me. That's when I hear a low whisper, *Bloody El*.

I freeze at the comment, and look down, my clothes are splattered with blood. The blood is turning brown against my once white pants, they stiffen as they dry.

I let out a shuddering breath as I look at my arms and bring them to my face, blood, I've taken a life, and it's spilled across my body like a haunting story.

Still looking at my hands I see that the other boys have run up to Mike and I, concern written on their faces. For me, everything is moving in slow motion, my head unable to comprehend the horror it just witnessed, the feeling of almost losing someone she loved.

I look and see Will is now in front of me, he clasps his hands around my arms and brings them down to my side, he slowly wraps me into a hug. He always knows how to save me from myself.

It's then I feel everything that just happen wash over me like a bucket of water. I crumple into his shirt and sob. I'm still somehow able to manage to recognize we are still on the top deck, that there are other men watching, so I keep my sobs quiet and my head in Will's chest.

He pulls away slightly, then says "Come on" as he leads me back down to our kip, where I can cry in peace.

Once we are down there, I wrap myself back into Will's arms and I let the tears come once again. I know the other boys are here as well, but they aren't judging, they aren't jeering, for we have all seen it now, and it's frightening.

I let myself stay clung into Will's embrace for awhile, I finally feel

myself calming down a bit, so I pull back.

I give him a watery smile, which he returns. I gingerly look to the other boys who have remained silent for the most part. But, I know one of them will ask, and as if he read my mind, Lucas asks, "What happened?"

I look over to Mike who, as well, seems a bit withdrawn, he looks at the other boys and shakes his head, "El, he-" Mike starts, but I can tell he's shaky too.

"He saved me" Mike whispers as he looks over to me. I shake my head, "No, I-" I attempt to start, but Mike cuts me off, "Yes! Yes, you did! If it wasn't for you, I'd have a cutlass in my head!" he yells as he approaches me.

Mike stands in front of me, looking me over, I can't help but feel small compared to him. He turns and looks at the other boys, "If we thought we were brave, we've got nothing compared to El". The boys eyes widen in shock.

Mike turns back to me, he places his hands on my shoulders and stares me down, "Don't you ever, *ever*, say that you didn't save me" we look at each other with matching brown eyes.

"I owe you my life" Mike breaths as he unexpectedly pulls me into a tight hug. I'm shocked at first, not really knowing what to do, but I hesitantly bring my hands up and around onto his back.

I hear him begin to snifle, and now I feel my eyes watering too, I try to hold them in though. He pulls back and I watch as tears fall from his eyes, "There's no one braver than you, El".

The rest of the boys come up around us, and form a group hug. I'm pushed into Mike's chest once again, but this time I do relish the moment and hold it and place it next to my heart.

I feel them all around me, I sigh in relief knowing that we all survived this horror, I don't know what I would have done if I lost any of them. I look at Mike again, I allow myself to smile knowing I saved someone I loved deeply.

WOW! Definitely my longest yet, but I couldn't stop! I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, some new discoveries for El, and a battle scene too! And of course MILEVEN FLUFF!

I'll be updating soon!

PLEASE REVIEW! IT'S ALWAYS APPRECIATED!

11. The Blue Tattoo

Hello again! I'm sorry for taking longer to update I've been so crazy busy that I've had barely anytime to write!

Thank you all for the reviews from the last chapter, they are always great to read!

Anyways, here's the next chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of View:

After the initial intake of what had just occurred, I noticed that it was much quieter about the ship. There was obviously movement about on the top deck, but there was less of a hustle then there usually was.

Once the shock of the whole ordeal passed, I excused myself from the boys, for I wanted to be able to get cleaned up in private.

They were very objective at first, but I relented and told them I really needed some time to myself, which was kind of true.

I fetched myself a pail of sea water and an old cloth. In my hiding spot I carefully peeled off my clothes that were thick with dried blood. I desperately tried to ignore the fact that it was, in fact, blood on my clothes.

Once my clothes were peeled off I gently cleaned myself from top to bottom, erasing the memories that I so wanted to forget already.

As I did so, I tried to think of Mike, and what he had said about me to the boys. I smile secretly to myself, allowing his words to comfort me like a warm blanket.

I finish scrubbing the blood from my skin and replace my old clothes with Will's old outfit he had given to me, since he had outgrown them. I'm thankful that I'm still small and can squeeze into the clothing.

I tie a knot around my waist with the drawstring attached. I drop my hands and look at my old clothing that is now in a pile on the wooden floor.

I sigh a little, they were the last things that connected me to my old home. I hesitantly pick them up, for now they make me shudder as to what they now hold in memories.

I turn my head to the left, where a small porthole allows me access to the ocean and crashing waves. I bundle the clothes together and quickly toss them out the window. I feel myself let out a breath, attempting to erase the feelings of dread.

Lastly, I dump the now red water out of the porthole as well. I turn from my hiding spot and make my way back towards the boys.

Once I reach the boys I can see that they have changed into new clothes as well and have washed themselves up, Will, who is facing my direction, smiles as I return.

The other boys catch his smile, so they turn towards me and give me matching grins. "How you doing El?" Lucas asks me as I approach them.

I don't say anything because I'm not really in the mood to, so I shrug my shoulders at him and cast my gaze down to my feet, as I wrap my arms around myself.

"Steve just came down to see us" Dustin mutters, I give him a confused look, "Why?" I whisper.

Dustin sighs, "We lost some men during the fight" he says simply, my eyes go wide, but my gut knows better, I heard the screams, it's honestly no surprise that we didn't walk away without any casualties.

"Yeah, there, um, being tied up in their hammocks by their mates", Lucas says quietly as he looks about, "We're supposed to go up top to send them off".

I nod my head in understanding, Will comes up to me and places an arm around my shoulder, we lead the way out as we head to the upper deck.

On the upper deck, there are men standing about, I can see that there are four hammocks tied neatly in the center. I can feel my heart start to beat wildly as I see them, my anxiety begins to stir as I think of how close Mike was to ending up with us tying him up and sending him over the railings and into the churning sea below.

My eyes begin to water at the thought, but I hold them in, now that we are in front of the other men.

We stand together as Captain Hopper stands by the railing of the *Hawk*. He is firmly grasping his hat in his right hand as he lays it upon his chest. The first hammock is brought to the railing, his name is said, a prayer is given, and then his mates tip him over the side, and he is gone.

The step is repeated three more times, my tears getting harder to fight each time. I let them loosely fall down my face, but I don't let out any harrowing sobs.

Once all of the fallen men have been sent off, Captain Hopper says a few words, and it's back to work.

I can't help but feel a bit heartfelt for the men who fell in battle, in how quickly their deaths are put aside and we're back to what we were doing before, like they didn't even matter.

But, I know it's something I have to learn to live with. For, I can't spend my time moping about because I know the other men who lost a mate a grieving harder. The boys and I make our way to the foretop.

We are silent in each others presence, taking in the days events. The warm breeze passes over us, our shirts and hair billowing about.

I sigh and look at the boys around me, and I feel myself allow a small smile, I reach out my hand towards Will, and gives it a squeeze.

Will looks at me a bit confused, but understands, he turns and grabs Dustin's hand, who grabs Lucas', who grasps Mike's, who finally grasps mine. We look about one another.

"I'm happy that someone was looking out for us all today", I whisper

as the boys give small nods in agreement.

"To the Brotherhood of the *H.M.S Hawk*" Dustin raises up his and Will's hand, we all smile in return as we raise our joined hands and repeat, "To the Brotherhood of the *H.M.S Hawk*!"

It takes a couple of days for the mood of the ship to return to its usually atmosphere. The sailors and officers are starting to joke about again, and the shouting and jeering return as well.

Us ships boys are in a better mood as well, for me especially since the whole ordeal took its toll upon me the hardest. But, as I said before, I knew I needed to move on, the rest of the men and boys did, so I follow the lead.

The ship has been fully repaired by the carpenters aboard the ship as well. The poor old *Hawk* having received some nasty holes from the pirates ship, but after some bandaging, she's good as new.

The atmosphere continues to grow as Captain Hopper announces to us that we are officially heading to port to sell our prizes. We are heading towards a place called Palma and we are all excited, for we haven't set foot on solid ground in over a year. And everyone is antsy to get off the ship for a bit.

We're all in a line at the head of the ladder leading down the side of the ship, all the boys are decked out in their new uniforms, and I can't stand how proud I feel. They all look splendid and my heart about bursts with joy.

Captain Hopper and his officers stand beside us, for they are waiting for the Admiral to come aboard for a meeting with the Captain.

The noble *Hawk* is all bedecked with flags and buntings and all the sailors and officers are in their best uniforms manning the rails and the tops. We aren't the only King's ship in the harbor, there's the *Promise* and the *Schwinn*. There's a bunch of merchant ship's too.

I watch closely as Captain Hopper paces about, he's covered in blue

and gold, and he looks over to us, he smiles and makes his way over. He gives me a small wink, "Don't you boys look fine and dandy", he looks our line up and down.

I can't help but beam at his remark, I know the boys want to roll their eyes, but they hesitate in front of the Captain.

But, I notice that he hesitates a bit and looks between me and the other boys, my smile vanishes as my mouth goes into a straight line. I can't help but think he is thinking of the battle, I silently hope and pray in my mind he doesn't say anything.

"Mr. Powell", he says to the officer who doesn't seem to leave the Captain's side, "Yessir" he says nodding towards the Captain.

Captain Hopper points a finger in my direction, "Have Brenner here grow out his hair, so that he will match the other boys", he says thoughtfully.

I attempt to not widen my eyes at his statement, *Uh-oh*, I think to myself. Mr. Powell turns towards me and says, "Make it so, Brenner", he states plainly, I nod my head, "Aye, sir" I say.

There's a fuss starting to billow throughout the ship as the Admiral's boat is seen making its way towards the ship. Us ship boys whip our right hands to our foreheads, hands flat with palms out, middle finger just touching our right eyebrow.

The Admiral climbs aboard the *Hawk*, he quietly strides by us, and as he passes we bring our hands down to our sides.

Captain Hopper takes off his hat and bows lowly to the Admiral, the Captain introduces his officers, there's more bowing and I can see the Admiral smiling about as he meets each officer.

Finally, all the officers head down to the Captain's quarters to treat themselves to wine, brandy and the finest of food the ship has to offer. I scoff a bit at this, having grown wary of the horse meat and stew we have day in and day out, the menu changing on a rare occasion.

We are put At Ease, which means we relax, however, we cannot

move from our spots until we are given a direct order from the Bo'sun.

"Wow, look at that", I hear Dustin sigh a couple boys down from me. He's looking out over the town of Palma all starry eyed. I can't help but marvel at the sight as well. I've never seen any town like this before.

The buildings are low and colored pink and white and there's acres of trees. "I bet those are orange trees, or maybe bananas, I've never had those", Dustin remarks as he licks his lips.

"I've never had them either", I whisper taking in the sight as the other boys nod in agreement. So, we fidget and anxiously await to be dismissed.

Finally, after what seems like a lifetime the Admiral and his followers come back, considerably cheered and red-faced from their fine luncheon. Bows and salutes are given all around and they leave.

We are finally dismissed.

We ship's boys don't ask permission to go aboard because we know that they will just tell us "no". So we bustle into the first boat going ashore and keep our heads down under the gunwales. No one notices us in all of the excitement anyways.

Soon we're rolling up the street, eager as ever to explore this new exotic land. We take a moment to admire the solid ground beneath our feet, having lost the familiarity of the earth after a long time at sea.

The boys are babbling excitedly, Lucas wants to go to a nearby tavern named the *Salty Dog*, so that he can take in a real pint of ale. Mike and Will agree to this suggestion as well, however, Dustin runs in front of us, stopping us all in our step.

"Now, just wait one second guys!" he states, the boys grow a bit annoyed at this huffing at his statement, "Dustin, come on, we don't get much time!" Lucas says exasperatedly, raising his hands above his

head.

Dustin gives them an incredulous look, "Hello? Don't you guys remember what we *swore* we were going to do the second we got on land?" he asks all of us.

The boys look at one another, unsure of what Dustin is remarking about, I am too, when suddenly, my brain remembers and I mentally slap a hand to my face.

A tattoo, I think to myself. I think back to many months ago to when Dustin suggested that we all get a tattoo to represent our Brotherhood and all. I honestly hoped they would all forget his stupid idea, and my skin would go un-inked for as long as I had anything to say about it.

But, obviously, Dustin hadn't forgotten his hair brain idea. "A tattoo!" he said mockingly to the boys.

"Oh yeah!" Lucas stated excitedly, Mike and Will's eyes light up as well. "I forgot we were going to do that!" Mike says.

"Yeah, so that's what we're doing first and foremost!" Dustin says joyously as he begins his trek again, us boys following closely. I roll my eyes, not very happy about the next part of the day.

We search the streets, our eyes stopping at all of the little stands that are selling exotic fruits none of us boys have laid eyes on, we are mesmerized by the colors and shapes.

On the way through the street we pass a brothel and one of the women leans out the window, showing her large expanse of white powdered chest and says, "Oh, look at the pretty little sailor boys. They're all dressed alike. Oh come look, Seraphina!" Another women appears and coos over us and asks us in. She pouts when we push on. I notice that Mike's face is brick red.

I toss an elbow into his side, teasing him, he swats me away giving me a small grin.

Finally, we spot a large wooden sign that is painted in faded red paint, it reads: Roderigo's Tattoo's.

We see under the sign sits a man on a stool. He has no shirt on and wears pants that only come down to his knees. Every inch of his skin is covered with intricate tattoos. We shyly sidle up.

He grins a not so toothy grin at us, "You come to Roderigo for the tattoo, eh? You come to the right place. I am the Master", he states proudly as he pounds his chest quickly with his right fist.

"You should trust no other with your skin, too. Guaranteed, my young friends, no mistakes, no fading, no infection. So, what have you?" he eyes us with dark eyes.

Now, Dustin doesn't seem so brave, he forgets how to speak, and gaps at Roderigo like a fish.

I take a look at the other boys, who seem to be in the same state of shock as well. *Boys!* I think to myself as I roll my eyes at their immaturity.

I turn towards them, "What do you guys want to get?" I ask a bit impatient.

They finally turn their eyes towards me and shake themselves out of their stupor. The boys eyes begin to roam around Roderigo's drawings.

Dustin points at a mermaid whose chest is fully revealed, he suggest we get it on our butts. I relinquish a firm "NO!" to that idea.

Mike thankfully agrees with me as well. We all go back and forth for a bit. When Will spots a small blue anchor, with a little rope around it and *H.M.S Hawk*, underneath in small letters.

Then comes the decision of the placement. Lucas suggests the back of his hand, but, Mike picks up and states that he is going to be an officer and officers aren't allowed to have tattoos, ones that show anyways.

Lucas grumbles at this as he and Mike go back and forth. I can see that this is going nowhere, so I march up to Roderigo and pull the side of my pants down a bit, showing him my right hip bone.

"It'll go here. That way it is hidden and only we boys will know the location. It'll be our way of secret communication and swearing and such", I say giving the boys a quick once over.

Instead of arguing the boys actually look surprised at my tenacity and give quick nods, "That'd be perfect!" Mike quips, "Yeah, I like that too" Will says.

So, once it's all agreed I look back to Rodrigo and says, "Put it there" I gesture to the spot again, "Two pence" he says sticking out a hand. I pay him the price, and he quickly gets to work.

It hurts like hell, but not enough to make me cry, I wince a bit as he works quick with his needle. I do have to hand it to the man, he knows what he is doing.

In time I watch as my right hip bone begins to become adorned with the blue ink. I can see the anchor, and then the rope. In fifteen minutes, he's finished.

I take a step back and the boys hover close to my new ink, their eyes begin to go wide, in fear or amazement, I'm not quite sure.

"Don't wash it for awhile," Rodrigo says turning to Dustin, who isn't acting all brave like he was before, now that he's seen me get the needle. As all eyes are on Dustin, I slip away unnoticed and head back towards the brothel, because now I know that there is a women there who speaks English.

She says her name is Mrs. Roundtree and asks, "Ain'tcha a bit young for this sort of thing?" But she continues to lead me into a little room, in which I follow her.

"No, ma'am, I just want to talk", and she looks at me funny and sits down on the bed.

She nods her head, "Okay then lad, but it'll still cost you a shilling".

"No problem", I say as I hand over the currency to her, which she slips down the front of her shirt.

I begin to feel a bit nervous as I look over to the well endowed woman, I take in a deep breath, "You see, I've got this friend and she's a girl and she's got something wrong with her and she doesn't know who-" I try, but Mrs. Roundtree gets up and comes over to me.

She pulls me to my feet, and gives me a few pokes here and her and then grins. "Well, now, Miss, shall we have some tea? We've got a lot of ground to cover".

I come back out into the bright light of the day having been educated. I found out that I'm not dying, which is a great relief to me. Mrs. Roundtree also explains, *everything*, to me about all the other things like the way of a man with a maid, and how babies are made and born.

I find it a bit disgusting, but maybe with someone you really loved, well, then maybe not too disgusting. My mind goes to Mike for a bit, but I shake it away quickly, knowing I shouldn't be thinking about stuff like that with him.

As I step out of the doorway, I loosen my pants and look down at my tattoo. It's starting to sting a little, but I remember what Rodrigo said, and I pull my pants back up and I begin to tie the drawstring just as the boys come around the corner.

They begin to hoot and holler and point and make crude jokes and Dustin is the first to speak, "How was it then, Elliot?". I feel my face go red, probably matching Mike's color from earlier, I tell them to sod off and that I was just going in to ask for directions.

They continue to jeer at me, not believing a word. I can see Mike looking at me funny, but I sigh and roll my eyes, at least it will help with the Deception.

The boys finally let up on me as Mike goes into the schpeal on Dustin, who passed out cold the second the needle touched his skin. The boys begin to howl with laughter, and I join in as well.

Dustin scoffs at us, saying that at least he didn't feel a thing afterwards. We all pull down our pants on our right hip bones and

place them together in a small circle against one another. The blue anchors smile back at us.

We pat each other on the back, accomplishing ourselves in a job well done and how we are now all officially brothers of the *H.M.S Hawk*.

We continue to make our way through the streets, we hear a voice holler to us, it's Jonathan and some of the other midshipman, "Hey boys, come join us for a drink in the tavern!" he yells.

Will, surprisingly, is the first to head towards Jonathan, we follow closely behind. Jonathan gives Will a pat on the head, which he greatly admires.

We all furrow into the tavern as our night is filled with drinking, dancing and song.

We have been in the Caribbean for almost three months now as we begin to head into the winter months. Mike, Lucas and Dustin's birthdays have all passed, officially making them 15. I marvel as to how long we have been at sea, and as to how much the boys have grown as well.

Dustin has begun to fill out, as his arms are built with muscle, he now being called upon to doing more carrying about the deck, his curly hair is pulled back into a messy ponytail like the other boys are as well.

Lucas has easily become taller. He is lean and able, as he has become more adept with climbing the riggings and hanging about the higher parts of the ship, I don't mind much, the foretop being the highest I like to go.

I even marvel at Will, who has finally grown taller than me. His long hair is pulled back into a neat ponytail, but he keeps his tied back in a neat bow, much like Jonathan's. Who, I've noticed he has begun to spend even more time with.

And then there's Mike. Although I marvel at each of the boys, I can't help but look at him more so. Long gone is the boyish face, as it has

begun to sharpen and turn into the face of a man. He is also easily the tallest of all five of us. Surpassing Lucas by two inches. He has grown into a handsome man.

We've continued our night sessions with Captain Hopper as well. Our skills have hands down improved greatly. No longer are we the stumbling fools that graced the Captain's eyes, but now we were becoming deadly fighters.

I couldn't help but watch Mike in one of our more recent practices. The moon was full that night. We now used real swords against each other instead of the wooden ones. We were careful when fighting, making sure not to hurt each other...too badly. But as our swords gleamed against the moon's light, I could see the determination and courage that had grown in Mike's eyes. He was much more certain than he used to be, I smiled at the thought.

However, I was still quicker than he was. As, he rarely won against me. Captain Hopper laughing each time I quashed him.

Although, as I had found with Mike, his temper would sometimes take hold, in which he would walk off in a tiff, abruptly ending our sessions.

Captain Hopper would idly pat my shoulder and say, "He's just a teenager", and he would bade me goodnight.

Mike would always hastily apologize the next day and comment on my sword skills, which would always leave me blushing.

But, I've noticed I've begun to change as well. And that is why I'm happy that as we've headed south, it has become a bit cooler.

For, I would have been stifling if we were still in North Africa. As I now have to wear an old tight shirt, inside another shirt, to squash down my chest, which is suddenly and traitorously growing and threatening to give me away. It works, but I fear soon, I won't be able to breathe.

Yesterday, Mr. Clarke gave us three new words *billowing*, *burgeoning* and *blossoming*. I could have swatted him.

It's just another Sunday, just another inspection. The ship is scrubbed down and we shine her up and we wait for the Captain to come about.

At least we're presentable now, and I make sure the boys are all lined up nice in our kip and that their uniforms are clean and crisp. They are all used to their uniforms by now and make no fuss about them.

I see that the other sailors wear neat caps upon their heads, and I reckon I will make myself one, especially since Captain Hopper has made for me to grow out my hair, which is now curling against my ears. A cap would be perfect for me to tuck my hair up and under to further me being discovered.

Captain Hopper comes by, Mr. Powell steadily behind him, "The boys are looking tidy" he comments, in which Mr. Powell nods.

"However, we're going to have to do something about this", he gestures towards our little kip, which I have attempted to straighten, but still looks a bit disheveled.

"I won't have my guns cluttered up", he states, as he looks at Mr. Powell.

"Let's rig up some hammocks for them" he says, "But, sir, there's not enough for five boys" Mr. Powell mutters to him.

"Well, then, set up three," he orders firmly, "We lost that many from the last fight", "Put this one"-as he points to Dustin- "In one by himself. The others can sleep two by two in the other hammocks, head to foot. Make it so" he gestures to Mr. Powell as he continues on his way.

So, we are issued three hammocks, Dustin snobbishly sets up his own, as he lets out a loud sigh in contentment at his own hammock.

Lucas and I stand arguing, "It should be Mike and me in one hammock, you and Will in the other". I argue, "Especially since Mike and I have the same shift and so do you and Will, that way we aren't waking each other up".

"Why you want to sleep with Mike?" Lucas gives me a curious look.

I huff, "I'd rather have my own hammock!" I lie, "But if I have to share, I'd rather it not be with you whose feet stink and Will who snores like an old cow!" I see Will gives me a look of "Hey!" but I give him a look of "Please!" too.

Will casts me a side glance, he looks at me then at Mike, and his eye brows go up a bit. He smiles and shakes his head. "Lucas, it works anyways for the shifts, and Mike is the tallest and El is the shortest and you and I are about the same size, it'll be fine," he huffs.

I give Will a fleeting look of "Thank you", he shrugs his shoulders, but continues to give me knowing look.

So, Mike and I hang up our hammock, he helps me get in first. And he haphazardly attempts to get in as well. I hold onto the sides for dear life, hoping we don't swing up and out of the cloth.

But, Mike settles in, and we have moment of fighting of which part goes where, but we eventually settle in to the hammock.

Our sides are pressed up against one another and I can feel Mike's warmth against mine.

We take a moment to marvel at how far we've come and what life has brought us. Mike talks about home a bit, and he talks about his sisters, about how Holly is close to five by now and she's probably changed a lot.

I enjoy listening to Mike talk about home, for I cannot talk about my true home. So, I listen intently and make comments when need be.

A "Quiet!" is heard from nearby, and Mike and I chuckle a bit, as we settle in for the night, "Night, El" he whispers, "Night, Mike" I say back. I relish once again in this moment of being so close to Mike, I know Will, will have a lot to say tomorrow, but I grin as I snuggle in, and drift off to sleep.

Yay, another chapter done! Hope you all liked it!

Again I am always happy to hear from my readers, maybe some suggestions, I LOVE REVIEWS!

Until next time, thanks for reading, next chapter will be up soon!

12. Confusion

I can't thank you all enough for the amazing reviews I've received from the last chapter! I love getting them and reading them as well, it totally makes my day!

Also, got some good suggestions that I'm going to try to incorporate as well, I love it when other authors or idea makers put in their input because it brings in ideas I might have never thought about.

Anyways, on with the story!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

Warning: Fight scene as well.

El's Point of View:

It's another early morning and Mr. Clarke has us out by the fantail. Apart from being a prime scientist and professor, Mr. Clarke has many skills in inventing as well. Today, he is showing us a large kite that he has thrown together.

Mike, Lucas and Dustin stand at the front, excitedly listening to Mr. Clarke gives his spiel on his design. Will, has me pulled a bit to the back, as he is whispering into my ear, still attempting to show that he is listening.

"So, what was that all about with the hammocks?" he teases, a light glint in his eyes. I roll my eyes at him.

"Nothing, I just thought it would be a good idea and all, since we are on the same shift after all", I try to say as nonchalantly as possible, while also feigning interest in Mr. Clarke's invention.

Will gives me a sharp nudge in the side, "Easy!" I hiss at him as I turn my attention towards him, but I can see he has a bit of worry in his eyes as well.

"El, don't play stupid, I know you like him", he says.

I purse my lips together and stare straight ahead, "I don't know what you're talking about".

Will sighs next to me, "El, you're honestly not as coy as you think you are". I turn towards him and give him a questioning look.

He rolls his eyes at me, "You seem to think the longing gazes and looks you give him when he puts all of his attention on you goes unnoticed by the other boys?" he questions.

This gets my attention a bit, "What do you mean?" I ask, "What I mean is that both Lucas and Dustin have noticed, a kind of, well, attraction, that you have with Mike".

My eyes go wide, "They said this to you?" I put my face close to his, "Well, kind of, they've noticed that you're much closer to him and seem kind of excited when he looks at you" he states.

"I do not!" I hiss at him, and as if Mike read my mind, he turns his head back towards Will and I, our eyes meet, and he gives me a small smile, which I can't help but return. He turns his head back around as I hear Will snickering.

"You honestly, *just* proved my point" he teases.

I fold my arms in front of me and frown, "He's the one who starts it", I argue.

Will just shakes his head, "Yeah, but the boys notice your looks more, their a bit more.... "Lovey" looks" he says.

I huff, "Look, you just need to be more careful" Will says as he places a hand on my shoulder, "I don't want you getting kicked off the ship" he says honestly looking at her.

I drop my shoulders and give him an earnest look, "Ok, I'll be more careful" I sigh, turning back towards Mr. Clarke.

Will chuckles again, I turn to eye him quickly, "What now?" I hiss, a bit annoyed.

"You just basically admitted that you liked, Mike" he whispered.

I give him a quick whack across the back of his head, as he continues to laugh at my suffering.

I've noticed that Mr. Clarke and the other boys are getting ready to launch the very large kite off the side of the ship. Mr. Clarke is explaining the whole process excitedly, his face turning red at his sputtering, " The same physical effect that lets our ship sail into the wind. I attended a lecture in London, concerning a fellow name of Bernoulli and his work. You see, it's the rush of wind over the curved surfaces of the sails and the kite, which set up a high pressure on one side and..."

I begin to find myself a bit bored, listening to Mr. Clarke's science talk, so I turn to look at Mike, Lucas and Dustin, who are holding a rope, waiting for Mr. Clarke to give the signal.

I watch as Mr. Clarke grabs onto the kite, as he is still continuing on about the logistics of the whole thing, when he picks up the kite and tosses it off the ship.

I chuckle as the boys stumble forward a bit at the sudden jerk of the kite getting swept up by the wind. There are cheers about the deck as everyone takes a moment to marvel at the kite gently swaying in the wind.

However, I see attached to the kite is a small leather harness, and I feel a bit worried. There's a small sack of flour cinched into the leather harness at the moment. I shudder a bit thinking that Mr. Clarke has some other ideas about what or *who* might be attached to the dreaded contraption.

Mr. Clarke and the boys are laughing in triumph, Will rushes over to help with the rope as well. I, however, take the moment to slink away incase Mr. Clarke gets any other ideas of putting the smallest seaman aboard in that harness.

I figure I'd make it up to Mr. Clarke for skipping out on his show by making myself useful by setting up the midshipman class, and I break my rule about never going into the midshipmen class without Mr. Clarke present.

As I enter, a boot shoots out and catches me on butt and knocks me down. I hit the floor and turn over in horror as I see Tommy standing over me, a cup in his hand and a broad smile on his face.

No one else is in the room, for they are all out looking at Mr. Clarkes kite, and I know immediately that I've made a grave mistake.

"Snot the sideboy, well, well," he says all jovial. "Come in, snot, you're just in time for a little sport."

His next kick catches me in the side and I feel something let go and the breath is knocked out of me and I can't take a breath back in, and he kicks me again and again and I feel something crumble in my other side, and I can't breath. My vision starts to blacken as my body screams out in pain.

"Ain't this some sport, runt" Tommy hisses at me, but I don't really care in the sense of I'm pretty sure my insides are about to turn to liquid.

He hauls back his boot again and he puts it into my stomach and I retch and he kicks me in the face and I breath in just enough to let out a shattering scream and then he kicks me in the forehead and there's blood flowing over my eyes and out of my nose and I scream and scream.

"MR. HARRISON!" I hear someone shout, far off in my misery and pain.

"The boy misspoke me, Sir! He was insolent!" says Tommy.

I then hear Tommy let out a gasp and a hard slam into what sounds like a wall, "YOU PUT YOUR FILTHY HANDS ON THIS BOY AGAIN AND YOU WILL BE KEELHAULED UNTIL YOU ARE DEAD!" The angry voice booms around me.

I can barely turn over and can see even less out of my eyes from the blood and swelling, but I can just barely make out that Captain Hopper has Tommy pressed firmly against the wall of the room, his hand is vice gripped around Tommy's throat, he is slowly turning purple.

"YOU THINK IT'S FUNNY TO BEAT UP ON A SHIP'S BOY, DO YA?!" I hear the Captain shout. Tommy attempts to speak, his voice garbled, "No...Captain" he wheezes.

"IF SOMEONE MIS-SPEAKS TO YOU, YOU COME DIRECTLY TO ME OR ANOTHER OFFICER, YOU DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHTS TO DO SO YOURSELF! DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR!" Captain Hopper spits into Tommy's face, that is now a deep purple, he attempts to nod.

"Good", the Captain hisses as he drops Tommy from his grip, who takes in a harrowing breath, he placing his hands on his knees to catch his breath.

"MR. POWELL!", I hear the Captain yell, "Yes, Sir", Mr. Powell quietly states as he turns up right next to the Captain, "Bring Mr. Harrison here up on deck, twenty lashes by the cat o'nine tails for insubordination".

"Aye, Captain" Mr. Powell states, he turns towards Tommy, whose eye's have gone wide in fear, Mr. Powell grabs him roughly and drags him towards the deck. "You heard the Captain" he almost says with a grin.

Tommy is sputtering a bit, as he attempts to move away, "Not the cat o'nine!" he begs. "Should have thought of that before you beat a poor ship's boy" Powell muttered as he dragged the struggling Tommy up on deck.

I'm attempting to put everything together in my head, but I can barely breath, a cough racks through my body and I spit up blood.

I noticed that more feet have made there way into the room, I hear shouts of "El!" around me, as I attempt to see who is in front of me.

"Will he be okay?" I hear Mike state worriedly as a hand brushes my hair away from my face. "What the hell happened!" I hear Dustin state as well.

"Bring him up to the sick bay, carefully", I hear Captain Hopper state.

I feel two sets of hands put their hands behind my head and underneath my shoulders. It's Mike and Dustin who attempt to get me

to stand.

"On the count of three, says Dustin. One, two, three!" I feel them lift me and I howl in pain. "Shit, we're hurting him!" I hear Dustin say into my right ear.

I slump forward a bit, a hand shoots forward to grab at my chest to pull me back, "He'll be okay, we need to get him to the sick bay", says Mike to my left, as they gingerly make their way up on deck and drag me to the sick bay.

My eyes have been glued shut by the dried blood and swelling, not that I really care anyways. I can tell we are on the deck once the harsh sunlight hits my closed eyelids.

Dustin and Mike are panting a bit, and I hear gasps around me, as I'm sure that most of the crew now sees what Tommy has done to a mere ship's boy.

"Dr. Coleman, we need help!" I hear Dustin state as I'm dragged into the sick bay.

"Good lord! Get him onto the table!" I hear the doctor shout.

The boys drag me over to the table, I feel Dustin let go of my right side, as Mike bends down a bit, I feel his arm beneath my legs now, "Hold on El, I'm going to lift you up", I hear him say. I brace myself for the pain.

As carefully as he can Mike whisks me up bridal style, as he places me onto the bed in the sick bay, I groan as I feel my insides shift. Mike let's go of my legs, and I feel I can't lay down, my arm is still wrapped around Mike's neck and my head is buried into his neck, I feel myself begin to cry.

"Shh, it's okay El, your ok, we're here", Mike soothes me as he slowly lays me down onto the cot, I groan and scream a bit as he lays me back, "Sorry" he whispers, over and over as he delicately lays me back.

Finally, after what feels like an eternity, I'm laying back on the cot, and I can feel the doctor begin to prod around.

He pokes at my ribs and stomach, and I feel his hand brush over my face, "We'll need to stitch that up, Mr. Wheeler, could you get some turpentine and a rag and wipe his face please".

I'm trying to remain as calm as possible, but I know I'm failing miserably as sobs rack my body, each time my stomach stinging at the reaction.

"This might sting a bit, sorry El," I hear Mike above me as I feel a rag being dapped across my face. I take this second to marvel at Mike's gentleness, he's trying desperately to cause me less pain than I'm already in.

In all honesty, as Mike wipes away the blood, the stinging is muffled by the pain in my stomach. As the blood is wiped away, I can begin to see out of my right eye again, my left one still swollen.

I can see Mike has a worried expression painted on his face, but also one of anger as well. I try to give him a small smile in my pain, "Thank you" I barely whisper. Mike stops for a moment, looks into my eye and shakes his head, "You don't need to thank me" he says back gently as he continues to mop up the blood.

"Okay, let's get this stitched up", I hear Dr. Coleman approach from behind me as he ready's the needle and thread.

I begin to feel him digging into my skin and pulling it back together. I spasm at the new sensation of pain as I howl out, then Mike's there and he's holding down my shoulders as the doctor stitched me up, "Shh, now, it's alright El", Mike attempts to soothe me as I write in agony.

Once the doctor is done stitching me up, I settle back down, he wipes his hands clean and comes back over to my side. He gingerly opens my mouth and feels around, "Some teeth are loose, but maybe they'll tighten up again if you don't worry them with your tongue. All right, sit him up" the doctor says.

I feel Mike lift me up once again, he holds me to settle down my movements. "There's no use wrapping floating ribs, they'll either set right or they won't" say Dr. Coleman as he moves his hands up and

down my sides attempting to relocate my ribs to their rightful spots.

Mike keeps me sitting up as the doctor comes back with a spoon in his hand, "Bottoms up" he says as he delicately places the spoon in my ruined mouth, I swallow the sweetness.

"Ok boys, you can bring him back to your quarters" the doctor says.

"Hang on, El" I hear Mike say as he puts an arm around my back and one under my legs, he lifts me swiftly as I lay my head under his chin.

"I can help" Dustin begins, but I feel Mike shake his head, "I've got him" he says as he approaches the door to the deck.

Dustin rushes to the door and holds it open for us. Even as I'm still in pain, I'm struck by how strong Mike has become in this moment. I'm also sure that I'm not much heavier than the powder bags he's used to carrying.

I attempt to look at him with my good eye, his face is set, a frown on his face and determination in his eyes. I can feel my heart begin to stir within my chest. I take the moment to bury myself a bit into his body and relax into his warmth.

Soon, we are back down to our deck, where our hammocks are swinging gently with the waves of the sea. Dustin helps Mike as he lifts me into the hammock, making sure I don't tumble out the other side.

I move slowly, getting myself comfortable, as the boys stand over me. I can feel the effects of whatever the doctor gave me hit me hard, as my good eye begins to droop.

I listen to the boys whispering around me as I fall into a dreamless slumber.

Apparently I sleep clear through till the next afternoon. I wake up and the boys are standing about watching me sleep.

Will is the first to notice my awakesness, as he smiles down at me,

"Hey", he whispers.

The other boys turn to look at me, looks of relief, and a bit of sadness etch their faces. Mike reaches over the hammock and hands me a cup, that's still very warm, I slowly take the cup and see that it is broth.

I give him a genuine smile as I slurp at the broth. Washing away the taste of blood.

My eye is still swollen, and my lips are out like a duck and I can't shut my jaw. I can only imagine what I must look like. I feel a wave of sadness rush over me knowing I'm probably not too good looking anymore, and how will anyone be able to love an ugly girl like me.

In my moment of distress, a tear rolls out of my eye, "Don't worry El, you'll be good as new in no time", I look up and see it's Mike who's speaking to me. He honestly looks unsure as to what to do or say, but I take his words and hold onto them for all their worth, knowing they came from him.

However, Mike's mouth set's into a grim line and his eyes are full of cold fury. He reaches out and pulls away a lock of my hair that has gotten stuck in the mess around my eye. His look changes to one of warm concern and then back to anger. I know he is beating himself up for this, him being the bold protector that he is. The one time, one of the boys is not with me, and I get beat up again.

Dustin speaks up, "Lor', El, you sure can scream," he says, "They must of heard you all the way to London!"

Both Will and Mike give him a sharp wack against his arms as they give him a dirty look, "Ow!" he whimpers rubbing both of his arms.

"Yeah, but he didn't scream as bad as Tommy did when the Bo'Sun came out with the cat o'nine tails!" Lucas chortles, and the other boys begin to chuckle as well.

"Yeah, you should have seen him El, really bloody coward he is!" Dustin laughed.

I hazily remember the Captain saying something about a cat o'nine

tails. "What happened?" I ask quietly, the boys grinning ear to ear.

"Once you fell asleep, we all went on deck to watch Tommy get what he deserved" Will explained.

"He was crying and begging to not get the lashings!" Lucas exclaimed as he clasped his hands together, "Oh, please don't, I didn't mean to!" Lucas imitated Tommy's histrionics.

The boys nodded all around, "He barely took five lashings before he was out cold", Will said.

"He was a bloody mess, that's for sure", Dustin said. "Yeah, and only two other midshipmen went to help him to the sick bay afterwards after everyone heard what he did to you", Mike stated as he stared at her.

Although I was somewhat happy with the lashing Tommy so rightfully deserved, a part of my gut was a little concerned. I knew that since Tommy got caught beating me, and he got humiliated by the Captain, that he wouldn't just let that go likely. I kept this thought to myself though.

A little while later, Jonathan and Steve both come down to visit me. I watch as Mike gives Steve a bit of a stink eye, knowing that he and Tommy were somewhat friends.

"What are you doing here?" Mike sneers as Steve raises a hand in defense, "Whoa, there Wheeler, just came to check on El", he says slowly.

Mike continues to glare at Steve, who sighs, "Look, I know I hung around Tommy and his group of croanies, but after what he did to El, I'm not going to sit by idly".

The other boys nod a bit, Mike huffs, but still watches him warily. "How you doin' El?" Jonathan asks as he looks over me.

I give a small shrug, "Sore" I croak out.

They nod in understanding, "Well, I wanted to come down and tell you that the doctor put you on the sick list so you can spend the day

in bed" says Jonathan.

I move my head up and down slowly in understanding, Steve reaches over and hands me a small vial, "What you need now is rest, kid" he says.

Slowly, I sit up a bit and pop open the vial. I tip my head back and let the medicine slip down my throat. It taste like candy and I lick my lips.

The effects are almost immediate as I once again start to feel my good eye flutter a bit, I'm out before I realize it.

Finally, after a couple days of hard rest, my chest is finally not exploding in pain, but instead there is a small ache that lingers here and there.

After a full week, I make it out of my hammock and walk towards the wash rooms. I hesitantly look up into the mirror and I'm a little shocked. My left eye is finally unswollen, it's a little bruised, but not as bad as I thought. My lips are also back to their normal size as if nothing happened. I'm starting to look like my old self and I sigh in relief.

I notice that the boys have kept an extra close eye on me, and one is rarely out of my sights. I love the boys, but it becomes a little annoying after a couple of weeks. And they shouldn't worry as much, for, I have come to keep the shiv Joyce left to Will and I slipped up and tied against my left arm, just incase.

I've noticed Mike is watching me much more intently as well. I know he feels like he failed me this last time, and wants to make up for it, so, I let the overwhelming stalking continue.

A month or so passes and I'm finally back to my old self. I have a small white scar across my eyebrow, but other than that I look just the same as before and I find myself overwhelmed with happiness at the thought.

The boys have returned to normal again as well, they aren't as hovey as they were in the beginning and are joking and jeering with each other once again.

However, today I roll my eyes and attempt to cover my red cheeks as the boys are *again* talking about the nature of things between men and woman. It seems it's all they ever talk about anymore and it drives me insane.

This is especially true since they have just about everything wrong with their descriptions and ideas. I want to lay it all out for them like Mrs. Roundtree did for me but that would be stupid. Plus I paid a shilling for that knowledge and if they think I'm giving it out for free, they're wrong.

I guess I snort too loud after a particularly choice piece of falsehood concerning the parts of a female when Lucas rounds on me.

"Alright, El" he says, pointing a finger at me, "You are the one with experience with that house back in Palma. Why don't you tell us straight then?"

Now, they're all looking at me with keen interest, even Mike as well, the fool.

I roll my eyes again, "I told you I was only asking for directions," I say.

"Yeah, right, and my mom's the Queen of Sheba. C'mon El, you've been there and done it, so tell us!" Lucas continues to badger me.

I stand and face them. I put my right hand on my hip and my left hand in the air and I say, "I, Elliot Brenner, swear on my tattoo and on my honor as a member of the Brotherhood, that I did nothing but ask for directions at that house" I look each of them in the eye.

Directions in how to be a girl, I finish to myself.

That satisfies them because they know I wouldn't lie under that oath. So, they fall back into their talk.

I sit back down and look about the boys. They are all talking about

their future endeavors and such, talking excitedly, but I notice that Mike is staring up to the sky, seeming forlorn.

I've noticed since the run in with Tommy, that even though he has been protective, he has been moody and hard to read. The other boys are moody at some points too, just like me, but, I can't help feeling Mike distancing himself a bit.

Oddly enough sometimes he's real warm and friendly to me and sometimes he's not. Like, sometimes we lie in our hammock at night and talk real low before going to sleep, him about how much he'd like to help his family, and me about carrying tea from China in my little ship. And he's usually laughing and calling me Captain Elliot and jeering at me, as I laugh and tell him it could happen one day.

But, then there are times where he don't talk at all. And it puts me off a bit, but I try to not let it bother me.

I bring my mind back to the foretop, and now Dustin is talking about how since we got tattoos and oaths and such, the next thing is a gold ring in our ears. I sigh at his tale of how it's tradition and such. I just hope his next idea isn't a bone through my nose or anything.

Once their talk has dwindled, Lucas makes the suggestion to go down to the bowsprit netting since it was a humid day in the Caribbean.

We all make our way down from the foretop. I walk with them towards the net as they doff their shirts. "Come on, El!" Dustin shouts.

I shake my head though, "Sorry, my ribs are still a bit sore", I feign my injuries to get out of the bowsprit netting.

They shrug their shoulders, but they all soon dive into the netting. I can no longer take off my shirt in front of them, for I would be discovered very quickly right there and then. I'm hoping as we get older, we will get more duties and less free time to help with the deception.

I listen to the boys now, well almost men, I think to myself. Their high voices are squeaking and switching between a high octave and a low tenor. Dustin's voice is on the verge of staying deep, his voice

cracking on a rare occasion. Lucas and Mike are still cracking on a regular basis. And, poor Will, his voice is just barely cracking, but I relish in this a bit because we still sound the same and it throws off suspicion.

My hair is growing ever longer now too. The shade is now closer to my mother's hair color, and I'm happy at the realization. It's almost long enough for a pigtail. I've begun to work on a cap already, so that I can easily hide my hair when the time comes.

For now, I watch the boys play joyously about, knowing that our "boyhood" won't last much longer.

Mike has continued to be acting very funny lately. Tonight, at our usual sword sessions with Captain Hopper, he is much more moodier than usual. We only make it about 15 minutes into the session, before the Captain says something, and it sets Mike right off. He leaves in a hurry.

I sigh and go to stand by Captain Hopper. He reaches out and pats my shoulder. "Don't worry about it kid, he'll grow out of it soon", he chuckles.

I give him a curious look, "It's just him and the boys growing up, just like you, bundles of moods is what you all are", he smiles.

I nod my head, but then turn back to him, "Thank you, for the whole Tommy thing, I never-" I try to say, but he holds a hand to silence me.

"Don't have to thank me, kid. I'm the Captain, it's what I do. He hurt you for something he shouldn't have, and that I know you didn't do" he looks me over, my eyes wide as I listen to him.

"You're a good kid, El, I know you better than he thinks, just keep your head up", he says as he makes his way back towards his cabin.

I remain in my spot and look up to the clear sky, I watch the sky turn with the luxurious stars, I close my eyes and silently hope things change soon.

But, they don't, not really. Mike's moodiness continues. Like, when we are up in the foretop and some leave so that it's just Mike and I, he'll swing over the side and leave. And he's been hanging around Dustin and Lucas more often. Then, if I come up to say something, he'll just grunt and turn away.

Then, in the hammock I've got to be real careful to stay over on my side and touch Mike as little as possible. It's impossible to not touch in our hammock, but when lying down now, he's much more stiff and unnatural. Even when I try to talk to him about my silly little dreams, he doesn't poke fun at me at all, he just grunts and tells me to go to sleep, I sigh and oblige him.

I feel tears prick my eyes a bit at his solidarity and coldness, I'm not exactly sure what I did to tick him off, but I wish I could reverse it.

We go out to our watch, and he doesn't even come to sit with me to talk, he's stopped coming to our lessons as well, in which the Captain notices that it bothers me, but I pretend I don't care and practice without him.

When our watch is over, I find an old blanket and curl up in our old kip between the guns. I don't sleep.

The other boys are acting weird around me as well, almost as if Mike's bad mood eats at all of them and turns them against me. Well, all but Will.

They begin to whisper behind my back and get real quiet when I get near. Will tries to stand by my side, but I push him away, telling him that he needs to hang tight with the boys so that he doesn't get shunned like I did.

Instead of continuing on the abandonment of my ship's boys, I decide to go back to where the hammocks hang and grab my gear. I go back up on deck and look about, I see the mizzentop and head there. Later, I go down to the rope locker, where I decide this will be my new "home" so that I don't have to be around the rest of the boys.

I look about the mizzentop and survey my new hangout. I decide I will continue to live the rest of my time on the ship in solidarity. I

also decide that I will make myself a dress. So, that maybe when we make the next port, I will slink off the ship, unnoticed and start my new life, once again as a girl.

A tear escapes my eye, and streaks down my cheek. He's just a boy. I thought he was something more, but he's not. Everything else was just something I made up in my mind.

It's been a week since I've separated myself from the boys, Will comes and makes small talk with me for a bit, but that's as much as I get.

I'm coming from the doctor's, where Mr. Clarke has sent me to get some books, and I see Dustin come rolling in the after hatch and I see Tommy sitting there all bloated with drink and I see him trip Dustin and then get up all smiling, saying, "Another little snot in need of a lesson", and he rears back and kicks him and *Oh no, not again.*

Just then I see Mike coming across the room with blood in his eyes and I drops the books and lunges forward and I tackle Mike. "Mike, no! If you touch him they'll hang you!" I hiss holding him down.

I watch as Tommy takes another kick, but then a voice cuts across the room, "That's enough Tommy!"

Tommy stops mid swing, he staggers a bit from his drinking. Mike stops his fidgeting as we both turn to look at the voice. I can see Jonathan is standing firm in his spot, his fists clenched at his sides.

Just then Jonathan lunges at Tommy, yelling the whole time. I let go of Mike as we both run towards Dustin and drag him out of the way by his ankles.

We watch as both Tommy and Jonathan swing punches at one another. Jonathan, surprising me by his quiet demeanor as to how well he is handling himself in the fight.

Tommy lands a punch across Jonathan's face, he stumbles a bit, but holds his ground. Jonathan manages to get behind Tommy, as he wraps an arm around his neck. Tommy gasping for breath, but he still struggles against Jonathan.

Jonathan spins and sends Tommy into a table face first. The table smashes as Tommy body slams it to the ground. He's groaning, attempting to stand. He turns back towards Jonathan, stumbling over his feet. I can see his nose is twisted off to the side, likely to go back into place.

Tommy attempts to stagger towards Jonathan, who braces himself. Suddenly a loud, "What's going on in here!" booms around the room. I turn and see Mr. Callahan along with other officers standing by his side.

Jonathan takes the moment to push Tommy away and gives him one last quick swift punch across the face, that sends Tommy tumbling to the ground.

Jonathan stumbles back and looks towards Callahan giving him a slick grin, "Tommy's been picking on these boys too long, needed to learn a lesson", he said.

Callahan shakes his head and sighs, he nods at the two officers standing next to him, who approach Tommy and pick him up.

He's barely conscious, he spits blood from his mouth as he points a finger at Jonathan, "This isn't over", he sputters.

He then turns his head and looks directly at me, "Filthy little seaboys, you'll see" he says as he's dragged out of the room.

We all take a moment to look at one another, shocked as to what just happened.

Jonathan approaches us and looks at Dustin, who seems to be doing okay, "How you doing Dustin" he asks.

Dustin shakes his head and attempts to give his toothless smile, "Jonathan, that was awesome!" he states.

We all chuckle a bit at Dustin, Mike and I lift him to his feet as we guide him to the sick bay, Jonathan in tow.

After, Mike and I drop off Dustin and leave the doctor to tend to him and Jonathan, we leave the sick bay.

Still a little shocked, we walk quietly, but still together, which hasn't happened for awhile, so I take it.

Finally, Mike stops and stares off from the railing, I stop and look too. He let's out a long sigh, "Look, El, I'm sorry for being a jerk to you", he says.

His voice startles me that I turn quickly towards him, waiting for him to say more, "It's just, things have...been...weird. And I don't...ugh!" he says frustrated as he slams his hands onto the railing.

I watch him, knowing that there's something bothering him, and that there's something about me that's triggering him, that's why he's kept his distance.

I place a gentle hand on his shoulder, he slowly turns his head to look at me. We stare into each others dark eyes. I give him a half smile, "It's okay Mike, I understand", I try.

Mike gives me a inquisitive look, "It's not okay" he says looking back out, "It's just...something about you...and I feel weird...and.." he tries, but slumps, defeated.

"Look, it's nothing to do with you, it's me, so you should come hang out with us again in the foretop and-" Mike tries but I stop him, I give him a tender look, "But, whatever it is about me, is bothering you and I don't want you to feel like that, it's different now" I whisper.

He looks at me softly, "But, El" he tries again, but I shake my head, "It's okay Mike, I'm fine on my own" I tell him.

I give him one last smile as I turn away, I know he is watching me go as I can feel his eyes boring into my back.

I let out a long breath as I walk away. I know that whatever is bothering Mike, he needs to figure it out first, and I can't be the constant reminder for him of what's ailing him. I need to separate myself, so that he knows for sure what it is.

I make my way back towards mizzentop and climb up top. I grab my bag that I've stashed there and pull out the fabric I purchased a couple days ago. I've begun to block out my dress. I pick up my stitch

from where I left off as I let my mind wander, the action always putting me at ease.

Yay! Another chapter completed and I really liked this one! Does anyone know what Mike might be pondering over in his mind?

The reveal is getting closer! Hope you are all enjoying the story! I should have another chapter up tomorrow hopefully!

I also love my Hopper and El pairing! And Mileve too!

Thank you all again for reading and as always PLEASE REVIEW! I love reading them!

13. Guilt

Thank you all for the wonderful reviews! I appreciate them more than you know! And I just wanted to take a moment to state a few things.

-I totally forgot about Billy, I was wracking my brains trying to bring in another villain, and he very much bypassed me for some reason. So, maybe down the road I will bring him in. But, many seem to like Tommy as the villain, which works great for me!

-Also, I would love to include Max, but for right now, Eleven is who I am focusing on as the main female. I will definitely try to include her down the road, I have a lot of ideas as to where this story will go, so don't lose hope!

I hope you are all enjoying this story, your love for it makes me passionate about writing it!

Anyways, on with the story!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

Mike's Point of View:

I have no idea what's been going on with me. It's like my head is in an ever waging battle between what I should and shouldn't do.

Ever since El was beaten again by Tommy, there's something that's been stirring inside me. Honestly, it's been there for quite awhile, but I've always managed to push it back down, ignoring it and letting it fester.

I'm not sure when it started, but it only happens when I'm around El. When our friendship first began, I saw him as a brother, as another lifeline to hold on to as we journey into this world.

But, then something began to change. As time passed on the ship, I noticed he looked at me differently, I thought it was because he was trying to figure out just who I truly am, but...there was something

else.

I secretly began loving our nightly sword fights with the Captain. Even though the Captain tended to criticize me more and instruct El more, I didn't really care, at first.

Honestly, I thought it was because he wasn't as good, so the Captain was making sure El gained all the skills he needed when we came across pirates or monsters.

Then the fight with the pirates happened. I thought I was brave, courageous, that I would be seen as a hero. But, instead I nearly lost my head to my own stupidity, and it was El, who I could hear screaming my name in desperation, who saved my life.

I truly owed him everything, I wouldn't be sitting here now if it weren't for him. But, after thinking about it for awhile, I could see there was something more to the desperation El showed me. He was terrified, as if losing me meant he would lose himself. And that scares me a bit.

Then, I noticed how El, whenever I held him to comfort him, he would get just a little closer. I could feel him sigh in contentment, as if me holding him was the best thing in the world.

And, I felt it too. It was almost as if we had a connection that we shared with each other, and none of the other boys. My heart was telling me this feeling, this need, was okay, that it was right. But, my gut and head screamed at me, that whatever was brewing between us, was not okay, that we would be shunned and disgraced.

So, I backed off, I turned my back on El, because I couldn't face the reality of what was going on. I would never be able to accept it, and neither would anyone else.

We would be put off, maybe even killed. And I couldn't face that, nor did I wish it upon El. Because, maybe, he didn't feel it, and it was all just me.

Worry and fear drowned me and I felt myself struggling against the torrent.

I knew that if I ignored him, if I separated myself, then, maybe, it would all be okay. But seeing his downhearted face each time I shrugged him off or blatantly ignored him, it broke my heart a little more each time, and it sucked.

But, I knew it had to be done, so I kept it up, and I found that the other boys, except for Will seemed to follow my lead. This confused me, but maybe they felt the same way too, and they were all just as scared as I was. However, I just accepted it and followed along with the other boys.

Then, El left our hammock, our hang out, everything. I could see him close himself into his own little box, and I couldn't help but feel guilty over the fact, that, this was my doing, and he honestly didn't deserve it.

When Dustin was attacked by Tommy, and El stopped me, and we worked together to help Dustin move away from Tommy and Jonathan's fight, it was like nothing happened.

We were working together, we were brothers who were making sure we weren't hurt in the scuffle. The way looked into my eyes afterwards, I knew I had to make things right again.

I desperately tried to explain myself to him, and El seemed to understand, but he also knew that I didn't know what was wrong either and it was up to me to figure it out on my own.

Now as I lay here in my hammock, alone and actually missing El and his company, I begin to question everything. Did I do right by myself and El? Or, am I just attempting to bury something inside of me that will be there no matter how hard I push it down?

I shut my eyes forcefully and attempt to let my heart and brain figure out their fight on their own. I wish to not be apart of their quarrel, I want everything to go back to the way things were.

El's Point of View:

I've been sleeping down in the rope locker for awhile now. It's been a

couple of days since my talk with Mike and he's still being as confusing as ever. I try to keep my distance with the boys and I keep myself away from Tommy as well.

He has been giving me a nasty look everytime I walk by, almost as if he's planning something dastardly. I shudder at the thought.

I'm actually beginning to miss the boys company and little protection ring they formed around me. At least with them by my side, I knew nothing would happen.

Tonight, I'm laying against the rope, and I'm shuffling about trying to get comfy. *This rope ain't the softest stuff...* I think to myself.

Once I get somewhat comfortable, I shut my eyes and think of what I may do next, just incase I get discovered and get thrown off. But, then I'm thinking of Joyce and Will and our old lives we used to have together. *I hope she is okay*, my mind wanders to Joyce, I think of her warm laughter and long dark hair.

A tear slowly rolls down my cheek, but I push my thoughts of her aside. I know we will see each other again, someday.

I'm slippin down into sleep, my awareness of around me starting to dissipate as my mind begins to dream, but, his hand is over my mouth and it's so big he has my whole jaw and my nose in it and I can't breathe and he's on me and I can't move.

"Time for a little chat, Elliot!" Tommy sneers into my ear. I can smell his sweat on him and the potent stench of alcohol on his breath.

I try to wiggle and squeal, but he's on me and I can't get away.

He pulls me upright, and drags me to a dark corner on the deck of the ship. The sky is covered in dark clouds tonight, no moon or stars to light the way. Giving Tommy the perfect opportunity to strike.

He pushes me up against the railing, hard. As he pushes my face right against the shiny railing. I try to yell, but he's holding my throat and I can't breath.

I'm starting to panic now, not knowing what to do. "You think, you

and your snot nosed friend's w-would get the b-best of old Tommy" he growls with a bit of a slur from his drink.

I try to shake my head no, but he's holding it down too hard. "I really, d-don't think, the crew will m-miss a little ship's boy" he chuckles.

Tommy attempts to bend down, and I notice his uneasiness, unsure of what he is doing, but then he stands back up as he grabs my hands and forces them around my back.

Then, in horror, I feel him trying to tie an old rope around my wrist, but I can tell he's fumbling, "S-stupid rope" he mutters, I take this moment to move around a bit, he let's go of my hands and grabs at my throat again with both his hands.

"S-stop your wriggling, it'll be o-o-" but he doesn't finish. I pull the shiv I've kept up my sleeve, from out of his gut, and he roars and stands up and looks at the bloodstain growing on his shirt.

I had only meant to prick him a bit to get him off of me, that's all I wanted, but I look at the shiv and the blood is on it all the way down t the hilt.

Tommy keeps roaring "*Son of a bitch, son of a bitch!*" over and over. He's teetering back and forth from the rum and stabbing and the rolling of the ship.

Then there's a voice yelling, "*It's Tommy, he's drunk and he stole James ration again.*"

And Tommy keeps reeling backwards and he hits the rail beside me, just at the ship rolls, and he's over the side and there's a splash and then, nothing.

There's shouts of "Man overboard," and bells ring and the ship comes about and men call out over the water. I freeze for a moment, then as the men begin to pour over to the side I slink away, trying to be invisible in all of the commotion.

I manage to slip away and go down to my hiding hole. I'm in shock again, my body trembles as my brain tries to figure out, what just happened?

I quiver in the dark for hours, as I hug my knees to my chest and I begin to think of all of the awful things that could happen to me from hanging, to the cat o'nine tails.

Maybe no one saw, maybe no one heard, maybe they'll just think he got drunk again and fell overboard... I hope and pray in my mind that this is what happens.

But, of course, this isn't what happens. The next morning blood is found on the deck near to where he went over, so all hands know it wasn't no accident. Tommy's few friends' swear the last thing they heard Tommy say as he went over was, "*Son of a bitch!*" His friend's were saying how Tommy was talking about his run in with Jonathan and how he was going to pay for what he did.

So, it's not me who will be hanging, it'll be Jonathan.

They have Jonathan tied up and it tears my heart to see him treated so, him being nothing but kind and teaching Will and I stuff. But, he also stood up and fought for us ship boys as well.

Will is standing next to me, I can see the worry and sadness etched across his face. And I feel my stomach give a sick lurch as to the fact that I caused this look.

They drag Jonathan off to the Captain's cabin, where the trial is being held. Jonathan's face is blank, and looks somewhat confused. I look away.

The trial drones on and on. There's two Marine sentries who stand outside the cabin, with their rifles held across their chests.

Witnesses are called in and then come back out, satisfaction on the faces of Tommy's mates, despair on those of Jonathan's friends. Captain Hopper and the officers talk on and on. The men listening in at the cabin window shake their heads sadly.

It looks like it's over. Jonathan will be hanged, and I'm the cause. No. This cannot be.

I break away from Will and I run down to the passageway and duck

under the guards and beats my fist against the door.

"What the Hell?" from within and, "Stop there, you!" from the sentries. One grabs me by the neck.

The door opens and Mr. Powell stands there, he seems a bit confused but ticked as well, he looks down at me.

"What do you want, boy?" he asks. I take in a deep breath and say, "Please, Sir, I've got something to say" I plead as it is the last clear thing I say as I plunge into the room and I throw myself in front of Captain Hopper.

He looks down at me all confused and says, "Kid?" a bit concerned, but I wells out, tears streaming down my face, "I was the one who did it, Sir" my hand up and praying.

"He was one me, and he was going to tie me u-up and th-throw me over the rails", I wail as the Captain and officers look at me a bit concerned.

"He had h-h-his hands on my mouth and throat, s-s-so I couldn't call out!" I reach into my vest and pull out my shiv and toss it down in front of the Captain, Tommy's blood still stuck to it.

"See, Sir, it wasn't Jonathan, it was me and I'm sorry, Sir, I'm sorry" I plead as I wipe my eyes and nose against my arm.

The Captain sighs as he looks down at my poor pathetic self, "Mr. Callahan, take him out of here, please".

I shake my head, "No, Captain Hopper, please!", I beg as Mr. Callahan comes up behind me and pulls me out roughly, I struggle against him, "Please, no, please!" I protest as I wriggle about, I look through bleary eyes, that Captain Hopper is giving me a defeated look.

The next thing I know, Mr. Callahan drags me out of the Captain's cabin and he brings me down to the brig, till I calm down and they have a chance to talk over what I just told them.

I'm still trying to catch my breath, and to wipe the tears and snot from my face as Mr. Callahan places me behind the bars.

I smash my fist against the wrought iron bars, "Mr. Callahan, please you have to listen!", but my cries fall on deaf ears as he turns to leave.

I'm about to curl up into a ball when I hear a gentle, "El?" from behind me.

I turn and see Jonathan is sitting on a bunk, he is untied and starting to approach me. I look at him and launch myself into his arms. The tears start coming hard and heavy now. "I-I-I'm so s-s-sorry!" I blubber into his chest.

Jonathan holds me close as he rubs my back and tries to soothe me, "Shhh, El, it's okay, it'll be okay" he whispers as he holds me, letting my tears come.

"That was a brave, brave thing to do, coming in there like that," he says, "I owe you my life, El", he says as he places his chin atop of my head.

I've calmed down a bit and sniffle, "I don't feel so brave," I say. He walks me over to the bunk, where he sits down and I lay down next him, my head in his lap. He begins to stroke my hair softly as I fall into a dead sleep.

The Marines come and get me in the late afternoon. They tie my hands in front of me. "Sorry, boy, rules are rules," and they take me to the Captain's cabin, where all the officers are looking dreadful and stearn.

I turn and face Captain Hopper, we stare into each other's eyes, searching for something. I can see he has bags under his eyes from the long hours of deliberating.

He sighs, "Brenner, place your hand on the Bible, do you swear to tell the truth, before the Almighty God?"

I place my hand on the Bible, and nods my head, "I do" I say quietly.

The Captain then asks for a play by play as to what happened, so I tell him how Tommy came to my resting place in the rope locker, and

dragged me up to the railing, where he was going to tie me up and cast me overboard.

"So, you had no ill intent for harming Mr. Harrington?", Captain Hopper asks, I shake my head quickly, "No, Sir, I tried to keep out of his way, he tended to find me, then he'd pummel me", I said.

The Captain gives me a little smile, there's a glint in his eye, "Why don't you tell us about those incidents, Mr. Brenner?" he says.

I know where he is going with this, so I recount both of my run ins with Tommy, and how he berated and beat me profusely.

Once I am done recounting my story, Captain Hopper nods, "Thank you Brenner, we will delegate, you are dismissed".

I sigh, hoping what I said will save both mine and Jonathan's sorry skin.

This time as I return to the brig, I see that it is empty, they have let Jonathan go, and I sigh in relief.

I look up to the light from the small grating in the ceiling high overhead. The grating lets out into the hold above and allows in a little light and air. I've seen a lot of thing in my life, but this is the first time I've seen bars between me and the world.

I see a couple of dark shadows pass by the grate, they are whispering to each other, I hear one of the shadows whisper, "El!" down to me below.

I allow myself a small smile, the boys have come to see me. "We're sorry, El", Dustin whispers, "We shouldn't have let it come this far" Lucas this time.

"It's alright boys", I say looking up "What have you heard?" I ask them.

"They were in there for hours talking about it", Will says.

"Yeah, and they went to the rope locker and sure enough there was your blanket and there was blood there too, so that helps your story",

Dustin retells.

"El." I hear Mike's voice. "You wouldn't have been sleeping down there if I hadn't been..." silence.

"No. It's alright," I say finally. "You couldn't known." Silence, again.

"I want you to go now," I whispers, "But, lads, if they do me in...I don't....I don't want you to watch, make an excuse or close your eyes or-" my words are caught in my throat, but they understand.

"All right", they say all quiet and low.

"And Mike..." I try. "Yeah" he says, but I shake my head, changing my mind and say, "No-nothing".

And they are gone.

The morning light squeezes its way into my little cell. I've spent most of the night tossing and turning, not knowing the outcome for today.

At dawn the Marines come back for me and tie my hands, this time behind my back. We march up the passageway and I hear a low whistle. I look about and see most of the crew on deck. I shudder only hoping my hanging is quick, and I don't embarrass myself. I don't see the boys, which gives me a bit of relief.

Finally, we reach Captain Hopper, his expression hard to read, I look down at my feet as he begins, "We find that you, Elliot Brenner, acted in self-defense and therefore are to go free".

My head shoots up and my eyes go wide at the Captain's words, he gives me a little wink and a smile curves at his lips.

I let out a breath I've been holding. And almost collapse at the news. I won't hang today.

The atmosphere around the ship changes dramatically. As if Tommy's presence was that of darkness and gloom.

The boys are in much better moods as well, for they finally invite me back to the foretop, as they are genuinely glad that I'm not swinging off the yardarm. I'm happy to be back in their presence, but, it's still not like old times, at least for me.

When they're talking and skylarking and don't notice, I go back to my spot in the mizzen top, just so that I can have some time for myself.

We've pulled up next to other ships we've come across, to get information on pirates and monsters. There has been apparently some uneasiness with the monster threat looming. It seems stable in some areas, and worse in others. I shudder as I think back to the monsters on that dreadful day.

I remember what Captain Hopper had said about raising us boys and men to become monster killers, I had silently hoped we wouldn't get involved, but it sounds like the threat may be closer than my liking, oh well.

It's a warm and sunny day in the Caribbean and I'm up in the mizzentop, working on my dress once again. The boys have their usual duties this morning, so I take the moment to be by myself.

I lose track of time, as I hear four bells from down below, my stomach gives a growl in hunger. I figure I'd finish up this last line of stitching, then head down for some lunch.

Just as I am finishing up, I see a mop of thick black hair pop up over the mizzentop. I recognize Mike immediatly, I decide to continue on my sewing.

He doesn't say anything right off, he just sits down, looking miserable. I don't say anything either.

Mike decides to break the silence, "Why don't you come up in the foretop with the rest of us anymore?" he says.

I shake my head, "Because, I still make you uncomfortable," more silence.

"I bet you regret getting the Brotherhood tattoo now, don't you?" he

says all sad and downcast.

I give him a bit of a smirk, "Of course not, no. We were all mates when we got them, and I'll remember that time fondly", I say still focusing on my sewing.

I notice that Mike has become a bit fidgety, like he wants to say something, so I put down my sewing and look at him genuinely, "What do you want to say to me, Mike?"

He won't meet my gaze, but then he looks up slowly, and our deep brown eyes take each other in, he softens, "When I was mean to you...I thought I...I was becoming, attracted to you" he whispers.

I watch as his face turns a deep red, he looks down again, "And, not with anyone else, just with you" he confesses.

Well then, I think, as I hide a small blush and smile for myself as he continues to look downwards, unable to meet my gaze again.

I decide to play with him a bit, "You'll just have to get over that, won't you," I say, "As it ain't natural", I tease.

He doesn't say anything, for a long while, "I know it's not natural and I know I'll have to leave the Service," he finally manages to say, hardly above a whisper.

"Good-bye, El. None of it was your fault." He begins to rise.

"Wait," I say getting to my feet. "Before you go, I want you to hold this up so I can measure it."

I pick up the dress and hold it out to him, he gives me a very confused look, "Wh-what is it?" he asks.

I give him a small smile, "A dress," I say matter of factly.

"A *dress*? For whom?" he looks at the material curiously, then back into my eyes, I finally give him a girlish look and flutter my eyes a bit, "For me," I say.

He seems a bit stunned at first, as he watches, I pull off my white

overshirt and pop open the top four buttons of my vest. I run my hand over my hair, pulling it from its tie, I fluff it up a bit in the light breeze. I take in a deep breath.

"That's much better. Now, Mike, come on. Don't be shy, now. Tuck it up against my ribs...Right, push it up there, while I mark it. Hold it now. There. Thanks."

I plop myself back down, a bit of a mischievous grin on my face. I look back up at Mike, who looks stunned.

"What's the matter, Mike? Ain't-cha never seen a girl?" I coo.

It's a good ten minutes he stands there staring. Then he sits down for another ten minutes just looking at me. I glance up every now and then to see him eyeing me up and down.

At last, he finds he can speak, he stands up, "What are we going to do, El?" he asks, all stupid.

I roll my eyes and get on my feet as well, we are facing each other square on. I finally give into my girly demeanor, I place a hand on his cheek and brush it sweetly, I can see that Mike is relishing a bit at the feeling, his eyes flutter a bit.

"What do you think we should do?" I ask him smiling. He honestly has no words as we stare at one another.

"All...All this time" he whispers as I give him a small nod. I watch as his mouth turns into grin, showing his white teeth.

He sighs, "God, I thought I was going mad!" he exclaims as he places a hand on top of mine. "I'm actually...quite relieved".

I chuckle at his statement, "I'm sure you are Mike, it seems that you're the only one who picked up on me though" I say.

His eyes go wide a bit, "Wait! Does Will know?!" he asks incredulously.

This time I let out a loud laugh, "Yes, of course he does" I say with a bit of cheek.

He shakes his head, "B-B-But, how..." he's at a loss for words, so I take his hands in mine, and I sit us back down. "Why don't I start at the beginning, the truth this time" I say.

Mike's looking at me with another confused look, I let out a breath, "Look, monsters attacked our home, Will's mom was my father's caretaker at our estate in London" I say.

"So, you didn't come off the street?" Mike asks, I shake my head, "No, we didn't want to seem like some, uptight privileged kids, so that we could make it onto the ship".

"I cut my hair, changed my name, and became a boy", I gestured to my appearance.

Mike looked stunned, then gave me a small smile, "So, what's your real name?" he asks gently.

I return his smile, "Eleanor, Eleanor Brenner" I say looking into his eyes, "Will has called me 'El' since we were kids, so Elliot, seemed like a good fit".

"Eleanor, El for short" Mike repeats, "I like it" he says as he gives me a bit of a lovingly look, I blush and duck my head for a bit.

I feel Mike reach out as he places a finger underneath my chin and tilts it upwards, so that we are once again looking into each others eyes. "Hey", he says, "I don't want you hiding from me anymore" he whispers.

I give him a tender look and smile, and I chuckle a bit, "So, Mike Wheeler, what are we going to do about-this?" I ask as I gesture between us.

He lets go of my chin and scoots closer to me, we are sitting shoulder to shoulder as we look into each others eyes, he smiles, "I-I don't know" he whispers.

I shake my head at his hesitation as we grow closer together, "Well, Mr. Wheeler, if you truly care about me, then you can kiss me".

I watch as his eyes widen a bit, but we move closer together, like

magnets. I can feel his breath against my face now, our eyes begin to shut, as we meet in the middle together.

To say it was the perfect first kiss, is an understatement. As our mouths move against each other, I can feel the electricity between us. I know Mike feels it to, as he presses closer, his arm moving to my shoulder as he pulls me closer.

We stay that way for a bit, then slowly, we move apart. We look into each others eyes, surveying the other. He smiles at me, his cheeks tinged with red as I'm sure mine are as well.

"That was-" Mike starts, "Perfect" I finish as we both dive back in, with a little more gusto, finally able to relinquish our feelings into this one moment.

As we kiss back and forth, I can't help but feel lost in the moment. For this small window of time, it's just Mike and I, a boy and a girl. No one there to spoil our moment. We spend the good part of the day in the mizzentop as we melt into each other.

Hahaha! The reveal finally happened! Sorry, I'm new to the whole kiss scenes, so I hope they are okay. I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, I know it's a little shorter, but it will be a good set-up to the next chapter!

Also what did you think of the Mike perspective? I think I'm going to add another bit in the next chapter as well.

As always, I love to hear from all you so PLEASE REVIEW! I love them!

Till next time, I hope you enjoyed!

14. Rendezvous

Hello again! I just want to thank everyone for the wonderful reviews I received from the last chapter! It's nice to finally have the reveal done, now I can work a bit more with Mike and Eleven.

And if you guys didn't read my comment in the comments for this story, I just got an invite from Archive of Our Own, I wanted to branch my story out a bit and the website has some AWESOME Mileven stories as well so you should all check it out. But, if you are already a fan of the site and see this story on there, I am the one publishing it as Demogorgon23, and it's not someone stealing my story, because I have seen that happen before. So, just wanted you guys to know!

P.S.: Did you guys see that in the Paley interview Levy stated that Mike and Eleven and even Max and Lucas will be going steady in season 3! I was wondering what was going to happen, but I can't wait to see what the next season brings!

Anyways, on with the story!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack.

Mike's Point of View:

After the trial it seemed like everything changed, that the way I had been treating El, was very much uncalled for.

Seeing him locked up and confined for the night, made me realize how much of a terrible friend I had been.

That night after visiting El, I sat in my hammock and thought of what was to come next, my heart and brain tugged at one another. I wasn't really sure which one would win.

Then, the trial came and miraculously, El was set free, and us boys couldn't have been happier. Dustin had excitedly approached El and made him promise that he would return to the foretop with us and

that we put everything else behind us.

I watched as El digested Dustin's suggestion, instead of seeming excited, he looked a bit concerned, and I knew it was because of me.

After a bit of looking back and forth between us boys, and both Lucas and Will joining in with the invitation, he gave us a small smile and nodded his head.

The next couple of days went by slowly, for me anyways. In all honesty I was somewhat happy to see El back up in the foretop with us, it was just like old times.

However, I noticed very quickly that El seemed much more withdrawn, he was quiet and joined in very little to our conversations, I even noticed that he would slink away eventually and go off elsewhere.

I desperately tried to not let it annoy me, but it did. Eventually El was only coming up if we asked him, and not on his own will. One day I observed him grab a bundle of cloth and he shimmied his way up to the mizzentop.

I huffed, a bit annoyed at his behavior, *did he not like us at all anymore?* I desperately thought to myself.

I even noticed that he still wouldn't sleep in our hammock, but instead would curl up in our old kip that was between the guns aboard. He explained, to me, it was because he liked to curl up and not lay on his back. I grumbly accepted his explanation.

After awhile of this, I felt my heart and brain go back and forth once again, truly unsure as to what I was feeling. So, one night I decided to close my eyes and finally let my heart speak its truth.

In my mind I could see El as plain as day, and I questioned as to what I saw in him. My mind wrestled with the obvious facts of him being courageous and daring. But, then my imagination went to where I had dreaded it going for this whole excursion.

My mind began to list off all the things that were different about El than the other boys. He was funny, creative, encouraging, and those

eyes....for some reason he could get lost in them.

There was something about the way they would connect together. The way that they would laugh and share small moments together. And as much as I tried to push the feelings away, that what I was feeling wasn't true, the more I began to realize that there were more feelings there and I had to accept it.

I could feel the weight of the bricks that had been laying heavily upon me since I can remember finally remove themselves from my brain and heart.

I took in a shaky breath at the realization, that I had feelings for El. I placed an arm over my eyes and went back and forth with the unrelenting feelings.

I sighed, I knew this needed to end, and the only way to do so was to talk face to face with just El, and that's what I planned to do.

The next day I watched as El climbed up towards the mizzentop while I was finishing up my duties on deck. After about an hour, I noticed I had not seen him come down.

I brought in a deep breath into my chest, and made my way over, knowing it was now or never.

Upon climbing up to the mizzentop, as I went up and over the top, I looked to see El working on sewing, again, *when did he ever stop?* I thought to myself, but I noticed he barely gave me a glance as I sat down, staring hard at my feet.

I finally broke the silence, "Why don't you come up in the foretop with the rest of us anymore?" I ask.

El barely gives me a glance when he states it's because he still makes them feel uncomfortable. The silence moves between us, I'm assuming he's waiting for me to talk, but I honestly don't know what to say, especially as my heart hammers against my ribcage.

I finally speak again and ask him if he regrets the tattoo now. Surprisingly he says, no. That it reminds him of happier times with

the four of us.

I guess he has a point, I think to myself. El still isn't talking much, he just continues to sew.

I fidget at the uncomfortable quietness that stretches between us, and El notices, "What do you want me to say, Mike?" he finally asks.

I look up hesitantly, our dark eyes meeting, and I get lost for a moment. My palms begin to sweat, my heart still hammers, I take in a shaky breath and I finally tell him.

"When I was mean to you...I thought I...I was becoming, attracted to you" I whisper, gazing down again. My mind begins to race as to what he must think of me now, *idiot!*, I think.

I feel my face begin to burn with embarrassment as I continue, "And, not with anyone else, just with you" I confess.

I'm honestly hoping he understands, that maybe he feels the same way, but instead I hear him sigh and say a bit roughly, "You'll just have to get over that, won't you," he says, "As it ain't natural".

I don't say anything, for a long while, my heart begins to break a bit, I knew he wouldn't feel the same, so I open my mouth once more, "I know it's not natural and I know I'll have to leave the Service," I finally manage to say, hardly above a whisper.

I begin to rise, knowing that the next step is basically throwing myself overboard for the extreme embarrassment that is about to storm me, I turn to look at him one last time, "Good-bye, El. None of it was your fault."

Just as I'm about to head out, gloom and misery filling me El yells, "Wait!" I stop my motion and turn to look at him, feeling a little hopeful again, *maybe he's changed his mind*, I think.

I watch as El stands and holds out his sewing project, I frown a bit, but he says "Before you go, I want you to hold this up so I can measure it."

He holds it out to me and I give him a very confused look, "Wh-what

is it?" I ask, running the material through my hands.

He gives me a small smile, "A dress," he says matter of factly.

"A *dress*? For whom?" I give him a surprised look as I gaze at the material curiously, I look back into his eyes, he finally gives me an unusual look and he flutters his eyes a bit, I'm suddenly reminded of my older sister, before he says, "For me".

I'm very stunned at first, not really sure as to what to expect next. My mind goes into overdrive, *is he some kind of weird guy who dresses as a woman or something, what have I gotten myself into!* My mind screams.

But then, El begins to move, I watch carefully as he pulls off his white overshirt as he begins to pop open the four buttons to the vest he wears beneath his white shirt, which I had always wondered why he wears it, for it must be really hot.

El continues to move as he pulls his hair tie from his ponytail and he lets his hair fly into the wind. I hadn't noticed how long it had gotten, since he keeps it tied up all the time.

He begins to fluff his hair up a bit, I squint a bit, again very reminded of my older sister. I watch as he takes in a deep breath, seeming somewhat relieved.

I take a moment to look down his vest a bit, and my eyes go wide a bit, noticing something very different. His chest is protruding slightly, unlike any of the boys he knows very closely, including himself. His mind *again* thinks of his sister and how she had developed over the years.

My mind begins to make the connection, but it won't name it yet, I continue to watch, as I'm sure I seem like a complete idiot in front of El.

My mouth gapes open a bit, as I hear El say, "That's much better. Now, Mike, come on. Don't be shy, now." He pulls me over towards him and he takes each of my hands and places them close to his chest. "Tuck it up against my ribs...Right, push it up there, while I mark it. Hold it now. There. Thanks" he says, as I follow his

directions, my brain still blank from what has finally clicked into my mind.

El sits back down, and I see he has a mysterious grin on his face. He looks me square in the eyes, with a bit of a glint as he says, "What's the matter Mike? Ain't-cha never seen a girl?" *she* coos at me.

My mind goes blank and I feel like I've been slapped by a stick or something. I stand there like an idiot for quite some time, processing everything.

El's a girl! My mind screams at me, my body goes from confusion, to realization to relief at mach speed.

But, instead of saying anything, I stand there for a good long while just staring at her, not saying anything. She has resumed her sewing.

I then move and sit down, as I continue to stare at her. I take in everything about her, her long brown, curly hair. Her rich brown eyes. And then, I begin to take in the features I refused to notice after my attraction began.

I see now that she has a perfectly rounded face, her mouth is small and pouty and her skin is soft and smooth, nothing like a boys.

How he had missed it, blows his mind, he's a complete idiot, he decides.

Finally, my mind begins to work and my mouth moves on its own, "What are we going to do El?" I ask a bit stupidly.

She chuckles at my question, "What do you think we should do?" she asks me smiling, placing a hand on my face. *God that smile!* I think, as we just stare at each other.

I sputter "All...All this time" I whisper as she gives me a small nod. My mouth turns into a full out grin.

I sigh, "God, I thought I was going mad!" I exclaim as I place a hand on top of hers. "I'm actually...quite relieved".

She chuckles at my statement, "I'm sure you are Mike, it seems that

you're the only one who picked up on me though" she says.

My eyes go wide a bit, my mind connecting another point together, "Wait! Does Will know?!" I ask incredulously.

"Of course he does", El rolls her eyes at me. I want to mentally slap myself in the face. *I'm so clueless!*

She then goes on to tell me about her and Will's actual life and how they came onto the ship. This takes me a bit to wrap my head around as well. But, I easily accept it, what with the biggest reveal happening only moments ago.

Then, I begin to feel the pull between us, the unspoken spark that has danced around them from the moment they met.

She gives me a tender look and a smile, and she chuckles a bit, "So, Mike Wheeler, what are we going to do about-this?" she asks gesturing between us.

I scoot closer to her so that we are sitting shoulder to shoulder as we look into each others eyes, I smile and whisper, "I-I don't know", feeling like a dork.

She shakes her head at my foolishness, we move closer together, "Well, Mr. Wheeler, if you truly care about me, then you can kiss me".

My eyes go wide from her statement, but it's honestly the only thing I've been thinking of from the moment she told me.

Our heads move closer together, our breaths passing over each others faces. When finally, we connect. The kiss is tender and sweet, just as a first kiss should be.

After a few moments of bliss we pull away staring at each other, grins as wide as the ocean, "That was-" I start as she finishes with, "Perfect".

And then we are connected again, slowly moving our lips against one another. I would have never guessed that falling in love would feel like this.

El's Point of View

Oh and it's a very different Michael Wheeler who walks the deck of the *H.M.S Hawk* now. I've begun to notice that he walks with a straighter posture and a know it all attitude, but I find it endearing.

I don't mind going back to the foretop now, Mike and I share secret glances here and there. But, it makes things on the ship go almost back to normal.

Shortly after I had revealed my secret to Mike, we made our way back down to the deck below. Mike seemed a bit unsure as to what to do next, as if a secret relationship was new to him.

He follows me like a lost puppy, not wanting to leave my side, I don't mind, but I also need to tell Will as soon as possible.

I give Mike a warm smile and whisper to him, "I'll meet up with you later, I've got to find Will". He's staring at me with big heart eyes, quite a one eighty in his change in demeanor towards me.

I give him a look, "Did you hear me?" I ask with a smile. He shakes his head a bit as he admires me, I give him a little whack across the side of his head.

"Ow", he whimpers, I shake my head, "Mike, you're going to have to be a little less conspicuous if you want this to work". He gives me a sheepish look as he rubs his head, "Sorry, you're just so, pretty" he says looking me over.

I can't help but blush a bit at his statement and my look softens, "Pretty, really?" I ask.

He gives me a wide smile, "The prettiest" he smirks.

I want to do nothing more then kiss him again, and from his look he wants to do the same, but I push it off for now.

"Later" I whisper to him placing a hand on his shoulder. He gives a small frown but nods, "I'll meet up with you later?" he asks.

I nod my head as I turn to go down to our sleeping quarters, "Of

course", I say as I give him one more quick look, as he gives me a longing look, and I head down the stairs to our sleeping quarters.

As I go down the stairs and look about I see that there are a couple of hammocks hanging, one being Will's and Lucas' shared one. I move silently towards it, hoping Will is taking a small nap in it.

I hesitantly look up and over into the hammock, and see Will, with his mouth wide open, slumbering away.

I give him a quick push and poke from the outside of the hammock, "Will!" I hiss. He jostles a bit, but keeps sleeping. I roll my eyes, *always the heavy sleeper*, I think to myself. This time I give him a sharp poke in his ribs, and this gets his attention.

He sits up quickly, "Uhn, wha?" he asks looking about through hooded eyes.

They land on me, "El?" he asks quietly, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"Will, I need to tell you something", I whisper towards him.

He looks at me questioningly, "What's wrong?" he asks a bit concerned. "Nothing" I shake my head, but my mouth betrays a smile, "I've got to tell you something that just happened".

I get up close to his ear and whisper, "I told Mike", a grin plastering my face, I watch as his eyes go wide.

"You what!" he shouts as he turns in his hammock just right and flips it over, Will spilling out onto the floor with a loud thump.

I get down to his form on the floor, "Are you okay?" I ask.

He pulls himself together as he gets to his feet, I follow him. He's looking about as if everyone is listening and watching.

"Why would you do that?" he hisses. I shrug my shoulders a bit, "Because he thought he was falling in love with a boy and he was going to leave the ship, it wasn't fair to him", I explain.

Will drops his shoulders and sighs, "Will he be able to keep it a

secret?" he asks concerned.

I open my mouth a bit, "Of course he will, I don't think he wants me getting thrown off anytime soon!" I say a bit defensive crossing my arms over my chest.

Will then gives me suspicious look, "And *why*, wouldn't he want that?" he asks.

I frown, knowing what he is implying I sigh and uncross my arms, I look about a bit making sure no one else is looking, "We kissed" I whispered.

Will's eyes go wide in a knowing look, as does his mouth, "Oh, I totally called it!" he says pointing a finger into my face.

My eyes roll at his reaction, "I knew you liked him, I knew it, I knew it!" he said excitedly.

I placed a hand over his mouth quickly, "Will you shut up!" I hiss.

He laughs as he removes my hand from his mouth, "Oh boy, so am I going to have to make sure you two keep your hands to yourself?" he teases.

I give him a light shove, "Don't even say that, it won't be like that" I say to him, but he rolls his eyes.

I find that I very quickly eat my words.

In the days that pass, Mike and I can barely keep our hands off of each other. Our night sessions with Captain Hopper, which resumed the same night I told him my secret. Have started to become a little flirtatious and knowing grins and smirks.

I notice that Captain Hopper gives us a curious look, but merely shrugs it off. When he calls it an early night. Mike and I share a knowing look with one another as we sneak off to my hiding spot.

We take it a bit slow at first, as we learn about each other in a whole new way. The small touches and grasps and the slow kisses.

We cuddle up close and whisper close to each others ears. Mike of course the ever eager one, almost always starts our little kisses.

He gives me those deep brown eyes, which I quickly get lost in myself, "You're beautiful" he'll tell me all wistful and full of charm.

And that's about all it takes for me to pull him by his shirt collar and I pull him in for a deep kiss. Our arms wrapping around each other tightly in our moment of bliss.

He grows a bit bolder as our time passes on the ship, for I have obviously returned to our shared hammock.

We are very spaciouly spread out throughout the lower deck, there being less crew members, so he will ask me to switch around quietly so we are curled right up next to each other.

And I cherish these moments, but I know we have to be careful to not get caught either. So, we share quiet moments tucked up against each other a quiet peck here and there, and after awhile I return to my normal position, but both of us much happier as we drift off to sleep.

One day, while we are curled up against each other in my little hide away, we are startled and nearly die of a heart attack when Will interrupts us.

"Good God you two, you need to calm it down a bit", he says to us as he chuckles at our state.

"Shut up!", Mike says throwing him a look, but red in the face nonetheless. I sigh and lean back into Mike's embrace, "What's going on?" I ask Will.

"The guys are asking where you two are, and I know what's been going on, so I figured I start here", Will says.

We both sigh, knowing we're pushing our luck a bit with disappearing so much. "You know, if you just told Dustin and Lucas it woul-" Will starts, until Mike and I bark a firm "No!" at him.

Mike and I look at each other, giving each other secret smiles, Will rolls his eyes at us. "Well, come on then, you two need to stop

devouring each others faces and show them you're still alive" he jokes.

Mike and I stand together as we watch Will leave. I turn to leave, but Mike stops me by grabbing a hold of my hand, I turn towards him.

I look into his face and I see his eyes give a mischievous glint, he places both hands around my face and pulls me into a deep kiss. I melt at the contact as I wrap my arms around his neck and he moves his hands around my waist.

We move against each other in sync, our lips tasting each other. "Seriously you guys!" we hear Will shout at us, as we break apart.

We give each other a sheepish grin as we finally pull apart. "To be continued" Mike whispers into my ear and I give him a devilish grin, "Of course", I say as I jump ahead of him and give him a little tease, I hear him groan as he trails after me.

Okay, what did you think of Mike's perspective? I kind of liked including it to show his reaction. Hope you are all loving the Mileven fluff as well!

Sorry for the shorter chapter as well, I should have another one up tomorrow, but just wanted to make sure to give you guys something today!

As always please review and stick around for the next chapter!

15. The Looming Threat

Wow, you guys are all awesome! Thank you for the wonderful reviews, they are so well appreciated! I know it's nice finally having some Mike and Eleven fluff as well.

Also, just wanted to point out that the kids are all now 15 years old and Dustin, Lucas and Mike are approaching 16, just to keep up with their ages.

On with the story!

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things* or *Bloody Jack*

El's point of view:

Things have gone back to relative normality upon the ship. It is a lot less hectic and forlorn as it was a couple months ago.

Mike and I have grown quite close as well, but as Will reminds us, constantly, we have to be careful as to not reveal my secret.

So, there are times where as much as I love having Mike wrapped around me, I send him off to hang out with the other boys, and I'll go and hang out with Jonathan or something.

It pains us each time, but we know we have to do so in order to keep up my deception.

Summer is coming to an end, and the boys are rapidly growing and changing, as I am as well. We've all grown in height, even Will has started to surpass me. And the boys are gaining in muscle as well too and their voices have all completely changed over.

I'm thankful that Will's voice still seems a bit on the high side, so I don't cover my voice as much either.

One day, as we are all on deck and performing our duties, Captain Hopper makes a rare appearance on deck. I stop scrubbing my spot for a second and squint my eyes as he walks out of his cabin.

It's a bright and sunny day, so I shield my eyes with a hand over my eyebrows as I watch him. He's looking around, craning his head, then his eyes land on me, I see him smile and approach.

I feel a little nervous, not really sure what the Captain wants. I turn back to my scrubbing momentarily while I await his approach.

As I'm scrubbing back and forth, I'm looking down and I see Captain Hopper's black shiny boots stop in my way.

I stop my motion and look up at the large man. He's looking down at me, he's grinning a bit, so I push my unsettled nerves aside.

I stand tentatively and stand at attention, I raise my hand to my brow and say, "Hello, Captain".

"At ease, kid", he says, so I settle myself. He gives me a quick once over, "El, would you mind grabbing your fellow ships boys and meeting me in my office?" he asks.

I give him a quizzical look, not really expecting that order, but I look him in the face and say, "Yes, Sir", giving him a nod.

He nods his head as well and turns back towards his cabin. I let out a small breath and look about the ship, Will, scrubbing the deck with me is the closest, so I approach him first, "Hey," I say.

He looks up from his work, "What' going on?" he asks. "The Captain just came to me he wants all of us ships boys to come to his cabin, immediately".

Will gives me a weird look as well, but he stands rubbing the sweat from his brow, "Why?" he asks confused.

I shrug my shoulders, "Would you mind grabbing Dustin and Lucas and I'll-", I start before Will finishes, "Go get, Mike?" he gives me a teasing look.

I shove his shoulder, "Yes" I say straightly as I head off to find my lovely sailor boy. I hear Will chuckling behind me as he goes to grab Dustin and Lucas.

I find Mike by himself, he is coiling rope by the far side of the ship, I turn my head about looking about, making sure there's no one too close in sight.

He hasn't seen me yet, so I approach him quietly and place my hands in front of his eyes swiftly. I feel him stiffen a bit at his sudden blindness, but he quickly chuckles, "Very funny, El" as he grabs both of my hands and swivels so that we are facing one another.

He is giving me one of his lovesick glances and melted smiles, I giggle at his appearance. "Have I ever told you how much I love it when you give me that look?" I flutter my eyelashes a bit.

He holds my hands delicately as we intertwine them, "It's because I've never met such an amazing girl before" he whispers giving me a roguish eye.

I blush under his compliments, but shake my head and slowly let go of his hands, as to not raise suspicion if someone decides to look our way.

He sighs at the lost contact, "I'd love to sit here and flirt with you all day, Mike, but I actually came over here for a purpose" I say.

I watch as his eyes widen a bit, and he blushes, but a knowing smile grows on his adorable face, "Oh, really?" he saunters a bit closer.

I give him a quick wack on his chest, chuckling a bit, "Not like that" I whisper to him, which he gives me a look of playfulness.

I sigh, "The Captain wants to see all of us", I say a bit blandly.

Just as Will did, Mike gives me a curious look, "Why", he asks. I huff at the same question, "I don't know, we'll have to go and find out".

Mike nods his head, as I grab his hand to pull him along, but he's quick and pulls me back to him, I'm startled by his move and begin to say, "Mike wh-" but he swiftly shuts me up as he places a quick kiss on my mouth, and spins me back forward as if nothing happened.

I'm a bit surprised by his boldness and quickness of his move, I hear him come up to my ear and whisper, "If you thought you'd get out of

kissing me, then you have another thing coming" he says a bit huskily that sends a shiver up my spin.

He walks ahead of me and looks back giving me a devilish look. I open my mouth in shock as my face is flushed from his actions and words. I catch up to him quickly giving him a swat on his shoulder as he just laughs.

Mike and I meet up with the other boys who are standing together near the front of the Captain's door, they all turn to look at us as we approach.

"So what's this all about?" Dustin asks with his arms folded in front of him. I seriously want to roll my eyes, sick of the same question, "Don't you think I would have said something to Will if I knew?" I snap a bit.

The boys give me a sideways glance, I huff, sometimes my moods swing quite fast and I have to catch myself, "Sorry, it's just you, Will and Mike asked me the same question, I honestly don't know what Captain Hopper wants", I explain.

Dustin gives a wide smile in return, his teeth have *finally* begun to peak out of his head, filling in his toothless smile, "It's all good, let's head in and see what he wants".

We all nod and turn towards the Captain's door. I let out a breath and give a quick *knock, knock, knock*, on the wooden door.

We wait in anticipation as we hear a "Come in!" shout back to us.

I reach out and grab the handle, twisting it slowly as I push open the door. As customary, as we enter, we line up side by side and stand at attention.

The Captain is sitting behind his desk, reading over some papers, Mr. Powell, Mr. Callahan and a few other officers are standing by as well.

I desperately try to not react or read the situation, so I stand motionless waiting for Captain Hopper to speak.

Finally, he puts down his paper, sighs, and stands and approaches us. He looks up and down our line. I'm trying to figure out if he is judging us in some way.

His eyes stop in front of Dustin, "How old are you boys now?" he asks. Dustin opens his mouth a bit, but finally utters, "Uh, Mike, Lucas and I are practically 16, El and Will are 15", he states.

Captain Hopper nods his head in understanding, his next question aimed at Mike, "And how long have you been on this ship?", Mike a bit more put together says, "Over two years, sir", he says.

The Captain smiles a bit, "You boys have been working hard and are making your way up here, you're almost too old to be called ships boys" he says.

He looks at the other officers present than back to us, "So, we've decided it's about time we promote you", he says, all of us break ranks a little bit as we let out a breath and look excitedly at each other.

"We've all been talking and have seen that you have all made such amazing progress, and you are no longer boys, but men", he says.

Women, I says to myself. But I continue to listen to the Captain's words.

"You will each be promoted to Able Seaman", our mouths open a bit in shock as we have passed by the Ordinary Seaman, which is usually the next step after ships boy.

"Each of you men have shown yourselves in multiple ways, and we want to acknowledge this by giving you a bit of a higher standing" he explains.

"So, each of you will be assigned to a new job and section of the ship", he explains.

My heart sinks a bit, although the excitement of us being promoted, the fact of the matter was the fact that we were going to be seperated a bit now, and there would be less time for us to meet up and just hang out.

But, I also realize that Mike and I might be separated as well, and I refrain from sighing at this realization.

"Mr. Henderson", the Captain bellows looking toward the curly head boy, Dustin steps forward and say, "Aye, Sir".

"You will be apprenticing under the ship's carpenter, Mr. Cavil, your strength and integrity have shown that you are handy with a tool", he explains.

Dustin grins at this preposition, "Thank you, Captain" he says as he steps back.

"Mr. Sinclair", the Captain says next, Lucas repeating Dustin's actions, "You seem to have a knack for heights and climbing, you will be assigned to the mizzentop, as a watchmen and sailor as well".

Lucas seems pleased with this, as he was the first of us, many moons ago when we were fresh on the ship, to be able to scale the riggings like a monkey in the amazon.

"Mr. Beyers", the Captain says, Will takes a step forward. "You, will be assisting Mr. Clarke" he says, I watch as Will furrows his eyes, this is something he already does.

"Mr. Clarke has told me you have an extraordinary skill for drawing, so, he would like your assistance with organizing and drawing his specimens, along with map charting as well", Captain Hopper explains.

A wide smile appears on Will's face. I smile a bit for him too, knowing that drawing is a known passion of the young man.

"You three, will be titled to your new uniforms, which you may pick up in the ship's stores" he says looking at the three boys, "You are dismissed". The boys go to, at ease, but Mike and I stay rooted to our spots, not really sure what the future holds for us.

The boys give us a bit of a hesitant look, but exit the Captain's cabin.

Captain Hopper then comes to stand in front of both Mike and I, and he gives us a wide grin.

He points a finger at us, "Now, you two, are a bit different than the other three" he states.

At this Mike and I do look towards each other a bit, giving each other a quick eye.

"You two have been working hard, especially with your sword skills, which have improved vastly since the beginning", he says.

He sighs before he continues, "We've gotten some intel, and the fact of the matter is the monster problem, it's spreading", he says with a grim face.

Mike and my face falls as well, this isn't what we wanted to hear. "How bad is it getting?" I whisper.

I watch as Captain Hopper shakes his head, "The mainlands are getting it the worst, and it's not getting any better".

"You see, we've already attempted to raid the nest once, and we nearly died trying" he explains.

"What do you mean, Sir?" Mike asks.

"A couple years ago, when the monster attacks started, a small fleet ship discovered an island, smack in the middle of the dreaded bermuda triangle" he explains grimly.

"It was surrounded by deep, swirling whirlpools and dark clouds hung gravely over it. But there was something else too", Captain Hopper looks into our now worried eyes.

"The closer the fleet ship got to the island, the more this white stuff began falling from the sky. They thought it was snow at first, but as they examined the substance they found it was some weird material, unlike they've ever seen", he said.

"The ship barely made it close enough to the island, and they reported that it looked decayed, as if nothing grew there. It was rich in blackness and decay".

I feel a shiver go down my spine as I listen to Captain Hopper's tale.

"They weren't sure what they were seeing, until they saw movement on the land. And that's when they saw the creatures attacking the mainland, the ship reported there were monsters of all sizes prowling about".

"Then, as if they sensed the ship's presence, they somehow managed to 'appear' right on their deck. It scared the living daylights out of them" he said shaking his head.

"They were just barely able to fight off the monsters, let alone get away, and that's when the reports made it across sea's", Captain Hopper finished, looking intensely at us.

I really didn't know what else to say, I opened my mouth to say something, but nothing came out. Mike spoke instead, "What did your crew do, Sir?"

Captain Hopper hung his head, "After the fleet ship made it's report, the King pulled together his best ships, and so did America as well. We grouped together, thinking we could take whatever it was down in one fell swoop".

He shook his head, "But, boy were we wrong" he says gloomily. "Whatever was on that island *knew* we were coming, it was ready, and it destroyed almost all of the ships, us and four others were the only ones to make it out alive".

"And after we returned, the King made a plan with the America's, that we would build bigger, stronger ships, with even stronger crews, and in three years times, we would try again", Captain Hopper says.

I eye him wearily, "When was that declaration made, Sir?" I ask him, knowing the answer.

He lets out a long breath, "The three year mark will be up next summer, that's why we took you boys in, to train you up, we're one of the ships that will be embarking once again, to face the nest" he concludes.

I shake my head, I knew we might be facing some monsters at some point, but he never said anything about us taking on a nest. "You,

lied", I say as low as possible.

Captain Hopper keeps his head down, ashamed, "Who else on the crew knows?" I ask, already knowing the answer.

"There's a reason why we've stayed at sea for so long, the monsters have a unique ability to be able to 'appear' out of nowhere, but only on land or a structured source, not water", he explains.

"We've been trying to keep the most able bodied and strongest men safe, away at sea, so that we can kill the nest, and stop this nightmare" he says.

I shake my head, my anger getting a bit better than me, "So you lie, and expect us to fight, like sending cattle out to be slaughtered!" my voice raises, I feel Mike step towards me as he places a hand on my shoulder, "El, calm down" he says in a calm voice.

I shake off his hand and look directly at the Captain now, "You were afraid that the men would abandon the ship!" I cry.

Now Captain Hopper stands in front of me giving me a leveled look, "They were safer out here then on land!" he barks back, I don't back down, giving his intensity right back.

"You need to understand that we did this so that we did this, so that we can make the mainland safe again, before too long there will be no ports safe" he says staring into my eyes.

"Don't you want a home to go back to?" he says harshly.

At this comment I take a step back, and I think of home, of papa, and where he ended up. But, then my mind goes to Joyce, wondering what has become of her home, was it fair for her to just abandon the only plan the world had at making a difference?

She takes a deep breath, then looks at Mike, who gives her a soft, longing look.

She sighs, knowing she's defeated, "What do you want with Mike and I then?" I ask looking into his dark eyes once again.

He lets out a long breath, "You two have shown extreme growth in your sword fighting skills, and you are quite brave as well, look back at the pirate attack" he says.

At this I look over to Mike, who hangs his head a bit, I know he still feels shame for his actions, though I have tried to tell him otherwise.

Captain Hopper seems to notice this as well, "Mike, you've got nothing to be ashamed of, you were the first across on the boarding party" he tries.

Mike whips his head up, his eyes fierce, "Yeah, but all I did was stand there and nearly lost my head, if it weren't for El, I wouldn't be standing here!" he says flustered.

The Captain shakes his head, "That's not the point, your other friends who just left, didn't even want to take a step on that ship, showing you had more bravery than they did, that's why I need you both".

Mike continues to give him a hard stare, but doesn't say anything, the Captain opens his mouth to speak again, "I need you two to start training the rest of the men aboard this vessel, and the new recruits coming aboard".

I narrow my eyes once again, "New recruits?" I ask.

Captain Hopper moves his head up and down, "Well, now that you five have been promoted, we need another set of ships boys aboard".

I give him a wild look, "So, you mean to say, to grab another set of young boys, and lead them off to their death!" I yell at him.

"Trust me, just like when you boys first came on this ship, you were escaping the dangers of the mainland, the sea is an escape" he tries.

But I shake my head at him, "Yeah, so they can get a taste of safety and freedom for a couple of months and then be expected to face an island full of monsters!" I accuse.

Captain Hopper breaths out, "There's always casualty in war, kid. You're going to have to learn that someday. I thought that maybe, you and Mike here could better prepare them, for when the time

comes" he tries to deliberate, "So, will you do it?"

I truly hate Captain Hopper's idea, but I can't seem to deny it either, I nod my head in acceptance.

"Good" he says clapping his hands together. "In the meantime, shifts will be set up where you will train certain groups at different times. And you will both be stationed on the quarterdeck to assist in the daily routines", he finishes.

I feel Mike's eyes on me, but I don't turn towards him, my heart softens a bit, knowing that Mike and I will be spending *a lot* more time together, and that I don't mind.

"You will go and pick up your new uniforms as well, dismissed", he says turning back towards the other officers.

Mike and I salute, and leave the cabin.

As soon as we are out of earshot, making our way down to the ship's stores, Mike whispers, "Are you okay?"

I play with his question in my mind before I answer, "I guess, not excited about everything, but what am I supposed to?"

As we head deeper into the ship, it gets darker and very few men make their way down here. Mike stops me, and turns me to look into my face.

I can feel my tears in my eyes, but I don't let them loose. "Don't worry, it'll be okay, this whole mess with the monsters will get figured out" he tries.

I shake my head, "I just hate knowing that I might be training some young boys to go off to their death" I confess, this time a tear drips down my cheek.

My falters a bit, but then he pulls me close. I love the feeling of his strong body against mine, it sends an immediate sensation of relaxation through me, I allow myself the moment of comfort.

"I'll be by your side the whole time, we got really lucky, being able to

do this together", Mike says, I can feel him smiling against my head, since he is almost a full two inches taller.

I sigh against his chest and pull back so I can look into his eyes, which are the few things I can see glistening in the semi-darkness.

I can see that he is worried, but there is also determination as well. "I'm glad I have you know" I confess.

A wide smile spreads across his face at my words, "I'm glad you finally told me", he teases.

I smile up at him as we stare into each other. Just as always, the gravity of the moment brings our faces closer together, as we look back and forth from each others eyes to the others lips.

I finally take the initiative and close the space between us. Mike is taken back a bit at my boldness, but I feel him smile into the kiss.

In that moment I pour out all my feelings, of feeling scared, angry and unsure as to what is to come next. But, Mike meets me at every feeling as we move our mouths hungrily against one another.

We have only kissed like this when we get heated and lost in the moment, but now it feels different, that it's a want and need.

I feel him pour his emotions into me as well. We match each other, and settle our feelings as we meld together, our hands moving over the others bodies.

Finally, we break apart panting a bit and lips swollen. I can see his eyes are darker than usual, there's more lurking there, so I tease him, "Easy there tiger, I know what you're thinking" I say sweetly.

He pulls me close into his chest, as he bites at my ear, "One of these times, I'm not going to be able to stop" he breathes his warm breath into my ear.

Even though we have been together for awhile, I know what the next step is, and what that could possibly lead to, and I've explained that to Mike numerous times.

Me becoming pregnant, would surely get me found out and me thrown off the ship. But the way Mike holds me and kisses me, it gets to a point where I find myself lost in the moment as well.

I let out a long breath and give him a tender smile, "One day Mike, I promise, only you" I say in half whisper.

He gives me a quick sweet kiss, "Yes, one day, I will marry you, and we will live a grand life together" he says as he places his forehead against mine.

I melt at his words, I love the fact that he says he will marry me, and I'm about over the moon.

We stay in our little moment for awhile longer. Lucky, that no one has yet find us tucked up in the stairwell.

We walk hand in hand until we reach the store room where we sadly part. We get our new uniforms and we are ready for our next step aboard the *H.M.S Hawk*.

Oooohhhh! Some new stuff happening now! I think some may think I had forgotten about the monster attacks and such, but I needed to get to a point to finally bring it back in. I've sprinkled it here and there, but I've finally gotten to the point where it becomes the chunk of the story.

Hope you loved the Mileven scenes!

As always, thanks for reading and PLEASE REVIEW!

Till next time!

16. Kingston

IMPORTANT PLEASE READ!

Ok, so I got a comment yesterday about me abandoning my other stories that I have written in the past. So, I just wanted to set the record straight that yes, I have 3 unfinished stories, however, if you look at the dates, that was almost between 7-8 years ago. At that time I was just beginning college, I unexpectedly lost a cousin who was very dear to me, and I was going through A LOT. So, writing wasn't super important to me at that time and I was super busy as well. I do have one finished story that I loved writing and I had a sequel going to it, but the t.v show I was basing it off of sucked once it got rebooted, so I stopped writing.

As I know other authors will understand, it takes a lot of time and dedication into writing these stories, it's not just something you can hammer out. I spend at least 2-3 hours writing per chapter. And the only reason I am updating so frequently is because I'm really slow at work and have the time to do so. However, that will not always be the case.

I have a lot of favorite stories on here that I love to read and get super excited when they are updated, however, sometimes it can take days or even weeks for the next chapter to come up. But, it's always worth the wait and understanding that we all have lives outside of working on fanfictions.

I was going to wait till next week to say this, but I won't be posting as much because Easter is Sunday, and my fiance and I are headed out on a short trip as well. We are leaving next Wednesday and won't be back till Monday. During that time I am using it to relax and enjoy the time with my fiance and friends. For, I am currently also working on my Master's in Counseling and my fiance and I are planning our wedding that is rapidly approaching in July. So, I will ask for patience next week.

Didn't mean to rant, but I also need readers to understand that

this takes a lot of time and that sometimes some stories you write don't just take off either. I've written over 15 chapters for this story, I know where I'm going with it, and wouldn't abandon it after working on it this hard and long.

Thank you all for understanding and reading this little blurb, and thank you for the reviews as well!

Ok, onto the next chapter, please enjoy!

Chapter 16

El's Point of View:

All of us are now decked out in our new gear that we received from the ship's store. After Mike and I's slight distraction in the stairwell, we finally made it down to the store where we were handed our new clothing from Mr. Melvald.

Dustin, Lucas and Will had already come and gone from the store, so we take our clothing, I head to my hidey hole and Mike begins to follow.

I turn and give him a tentative glance, "And where do you think you're going?" I ask teasing him. I watch as his face begins to turn red a bit. And I know I've caught him.

"Nowhere" he says sputtering a bit. I give him a knowing look, obviously he was hoping we would be changing together, and that he could have a little peek at me but I push a hand against his chest.

"Not, now Mike" I give him a bit of a grin. He huffs, "Come on El, just this once" he gives me those big brown eyes of him.

I shake my head, knowing exactly where he will go if I let him in with me, "Keep yourself together Mike, you're making this really difficult".

He gives me a sultry look, "Good, it's making it harder for you to say no then", he bends down to give me a quick kiss against my open mouth.

I give him a swat against his chest, "You're such a little scoundrel Mr. Wheeler" I whisper lowly.

"Besides, the boys will think it's a little weird for both of us to come back changed, together" I tell him obviously.

He sighs in defeat, but he's still giving me those lovely eyes of his, "You win again El, but one of these times you will give in" he chuckles as he kisses my forehead and leaves.

I revel in his look and words, knowing that yes, one day, I will give in. But, it won't be too soon.

So, after Mike leaves I change into the new outfit we were given. It's almost exactly the same as the one's I had made myself and the boys, as I had copied the sailors suits on board.

I find myself a little annoyed that the boys don't get to wear their uniforms that I so painstakingly worked on. But, I do know that I had made the outfits over a year ago, and the boys were rapidly outgrowing the suits I made them.

I keep Will's old vest still over my *still* growing chest, but I find that the new uniform is a bit more fitting to my arm's length, but it billows about a bit, which helps in hiding my chest. So, I accept the new clothing and neatly fold my now old uniform.

I tuck it into my seabag I had made. My hands trace the material and my eyes scan it. Remembering when I had first began sewing the uniform together.

Now, it was a relic of the past, a memory of my childhood that I am to now put behind me. The moment I step out onto deck, the boys and I will no longer be children, but adults.

I sigh and stand making my way out of my hiding hole and begin walking towards our sleeping quarters, where I know I will find the other guys hanging about.

As I walk into the quarters I look about at the "boys" now technically men, but will always be boys in my heart. And I can't help but feel my chest swell with emotions as I look at them in their new uniforms.

They too have the white billowing shirt in which they have tucked into their fine new blue pants, that actually stretch all the way past their ankles.

We were also commissioned blue bandanas as well, in which each boy has neatly tied around their necks. I'm still tying mine in a neat knot as I walk in.

They turn to me when they see me approach. "Where did you go?" Dustin asks suspiciously.

I roll my eyes, "Mr. Melvald forgot to give me my bandana and I wanted to go grab it, you guys just missed me is all" I lie smoothly.

Dustin nods his head, accepting my answer, but then he gestures to all of us, "Look at us now, *men!*" he exaggerates excitedly.

"We're no longer ship's boys, and now we have actual jobs!" he exclaims.

"Yeah, it'll be nice to actually start to go somewhere on this ship instead of just running errands and swabbing decks" Lucas exclaims.

We all nod our heads in agreeance. "So, what did Captain Hopper want with you two?" Will asks looking between Mike and I.

We look at each other with solemn faces. I shrug my shoulders, "Since we've been practicing so much with the Captain with sword techniques, he wants us to work with the other men and the new ship's boys who will be joining us" I explain.

"New ship's boys!?" Dustin yells towards us. We all raise an eyebrow at his reaction, "Well, of course the Captain will be bringing on new ship's boys" Lucas says nonchalantly.

Dustin ducks his head, "Yeah, but, so soon?" he whimpers.

I watch as Will rolls his eyes, "You were just saying how excited you were to be promoted, now you're sad we're not ship's boys anymore?"

Dustin shakes his head, "It's just, we were the kids for so long, now it's like we're being replaced".

Lucas clasps Dustin's shoulder, "It'll be okay Dustin, it's not like we're being dropped off the ship or something. And besides it'll be kind of cool to take some younger one's under our wing", he tries to cheer Dustin up.

Dustin lifts his head and gives a small smile, "Yeah, I guess you're right" he says agreeing.

"Well, we got to head up top to meet the quartermaster's for our new positions, we'll catch you two at dinner?" Will asks looking between Mike and I.

We nod our heads, "Yes, we will meet you at four bells" Mike says.

Dustin, Lucas and Will depart up the stairs, leaving Mike and I alone. He takes the moment to move closer to me.

"You look really cute in that outfit you know" he says as he pulls at my white shirt. I smirk at him and shake my head, "Ever the charmer" I whisper.

I turn so that we are chest to chest, Mike wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me close, I rest my hands on his chest as my fingers play with his bandana.

"You don't look too bad yourself" I say sweetly as I caress him. I look up at him with big eyes, as he looks down at me with hooded.

In all truth, Mike really does look adorable and handsome in his new uniform, it will be difficult to keep my eyes off of him now.

Mike places his forehead against mine and we both close our eyes. He sighs, "I can't wait for the day I can openly hug you and kiss you without people thinking we're weird" he says.

I chuckle at his statement as we sway back and forth in each others arms. "I know, someday, we'll be together, like a true man and woman" I say.

I feel him nod against my head, but he pulls away, and our eyes meet, "That'll be the best day of my life" he whispers.

I feel my face flush at his statements. It seems that Mike's devotion to me has come full circle. For, I admire him for everything he is, it's just hard sometimes to always show him or tell him how I truly feel.

So this time, I gently pull at his bandana and pull him against me. Our lips collide. And I try to show him exactly how I feel.

I start off slow and tender as our lips fit together like two puzzle pieces. Then, I slowly open my mouth, where we bring our tongues together in a tantalizing dance between us.

It's something that I know he loves, especially since he lets out a small groan as we explore each other. It's as if we haven't explored enough of each other.

His hands start to move as they trace down my sides, his hands land on my hips, but they slowly move lower and he gives me a quick squeezes gently.

I let out a small squeal at his motions, and break our contact for a bit, he's giving me a teasing look as his hands rest against my rear.

I shake my head at the boys forwardness, "You don't give up do you?" I ask.

He gives me a quick kiss, "Never", he says as he ducks his head and he captures my lips once again. We both let out a long breath as we resonate in our moment together.

Since he is allowed to let his hands roam, I let mine do the same grabbing him a bit as well, which elicits a moan from him as well. I smile against our mouths, "You're something else" Mike breathes against as he pulls me back in again.

We spend a couple more minutes breathing heavily as our lips connect and move, until I hastily pull away, an wicked smile against my face, "Time to go" I tease.

I look back over my shoulder to see Mike's forlorn face as he whines at the loss of my warmth. He stands a bit still not moving. "Come on" I say still grinning, knowing exactly why he's not moving.

He blushes a bit, "I'll meet you up there" he says scratching behind his head. I throw him a knowing look as I head to the upper deck, *that'll teach him a bit*, I think to myself as I approach the row of cutlasses against the ships railings.

Mike joins me on deck a handful of minutes later, his face still a bit red, but he walks up next to me, "What are you doing?" he asks.

I pick up a cutlass and examine it for a bit, I hold it at arm's length and look down the handle, squinting one eye close, "Checking to see the state in which these cutlasses are in" I say, as I lay the cutlass to the ground.

Mike gives me a curious look, "Why?", he asks. "Because, if you haven't noticed just about all of these cutlasses are uneven, and are either covered in dried blood or rust", I say.

"But, why does that matter?" the silly boy asks, I let out a breath of air and give him a look, I hold up the next blade and show it to him, "You see this blade?" I ask, Mike nods his head, his long black hair shaking about.

I raise it and quickly smack it across the railing, it shatters quickly, Mike jumps back a bit in shock, "Why did you do that?" he asks panicked.

"Do you want to go and fight off those monsters with blades that break in two seconds?" I say seriously.

Mike doesn't speak, but he shakes his head instead, "That's what I thought" I say, turning back to the other cutlasses.

"We need to sort through them and see which ones are good enough to refinish and which one's aren't worth saving" I state.

"How do we refinish them?" Mike asks as he begins to pick at the cutlasses.

"With stones made for sharpening blades, they have them in the ship's store, I've seen them" I say as I examine a very rusty blade, I cast it to the side.

"If there as rusty as that blade," I point to the one I just discarded, "Add it to the pile. They aren't worth saving" I explain to Mike.

He follows my lead, and soon we have a pile of rusty blades, salagable blades and blades that don't need any work.

I've noticed that there are more rusty blades than I like to see, but I know it's from the harsh weather we tend to get along with them receiving harsh blows from the salty sea below.

I sigh and look at Mike, who's waiting for my next instructions. "We need to talk to Captain Hopper" I say looking annoyingly at the blades.

Mike gives me a quick, curious look, "You sure?" he asks.

I nod my head and look at the blades once again, "Yes, very certain" I say as I make my way towards the Captain's cabin.

Mike trails behind me and I knock three times on the door. I hear a gruff, "Come in" from the other side.

I open the door and Mike and I stand side by side as Captain Hopper looks up from his desk, his hair a bit disheveled, it seems he has been working hard at something on his desk.

"Hey kids, what do you want?" he questions them, looking back down towards his work.

"Excuse me Captain Hopper, but I was wondering, that when we make port, that I make a purchase request?" I say a bit hesitant, not sure of what Captain Hopper's answer will be.

He slowly lifts his head and looks at us, "What kid of purchase?" he says lowly.

I swallow, taking in a deep breath, "Sir, I've just examined the cutlasses, and most are unusable. Mike and I can refinish a good half of them, but we need new ones" I state, giving him a hopeful look.

Captain Hopper looks back down to his work and mutters, "Not gonna' happen, kid" he says.

I'm a bit shocked at his lax demeanor and I'm taken aback as well. Not happy with his response I open my mouth, "Sir, you have to understand, without those cutlasses, more than half the crew will be defenseless" I explain, a bit haughtier this time to bring my point across.

Captain Hopper sets down his quill he's using and stands up in front of his desk, "What's wrong with the ones we've got?" he questions.

"Sir, more than half are so rusty, there's no way we could use them" I explain. "The second a man goes to use a fully rusty sword, they'll barely get one swing in before they are killed" I stress.

Captain Hopper is looking at me intently, trying to take me in. I soften my look, trying to show him that my intentions are clear and are for the safety of the crew.

He looks down and lets out a long breath, "How many do we need?" he asks defeated.

I try not to smile at his change of heart, "About a hundred sir. We can-" I try but the Captain interrupts me, "A hundred, kid seriously?" he grumbles wiping a hand across his face and through his messy hair.

"Like I said, Mike and I can refinish a good amount of them and some are in decent shape, but we still need to replace the rusty ones", I say.

He's looking between Mike and I now, he grumbles a bit more than says, "We'll be making port near Kingston in about a month. Show me what you can do with the salagable one's, then we'll see how many we need, got it kid?" he says looking at me.

I give him a small smile, "Aye, sir. Thank you" I say bowing and Mike following my lead. We exit the cabin and go back to the pile of swords.

"Okay Mike, grab the salagable one's and we'll get to work", I say as I pick up some and carry them down to our quarters.

I hear Mike sigh, but he follows my lead. Soon our quarters are filled with the salagable cutlasses, we head down to the stores to get

sharpening stones, and we get to work.

A month passes since we've gotten Captain Hopper's permission to purchase some new cutlasses for the crew once we make land, which seems like tomorrow according to the navigation crew.

Everyone is antsy with anticipation to finally make land again, it's been a long while since the last time we've stepped foot on land.

Although, we've all become much busier since we've been promoted, the boys and I find time to meet up and chat about our new jobs and assignments.

Dustin goes on and on about the hard work about being a carpenter's apprentice. How he has to learn all of this difficult calculations and such and moving things from here to there.

Lucas and Will are very happy with their new jobs. Lucas tells us how he really has no fear of heights and how he's gone to the very top of the main royal (the highest point on the ship), and he's learning how to tether and pull lines and drop and roll the sails.

Will talks about his time with Mr. Clarke and how he's gotten to experiment with new materials he's never handled before. He goes into lengthy detail about his new paints that are called, water colors, and how they bleed and blend across the thick parchment he uses.

Mike and I have been working tirelessly on reviving most of the cutlasses, but we've also been assigned specific groups to work with throughout the day as well. Most of the men we work with are fairly skilled, but we preach to them of how they need to be quicker on their feet and they need to be able to read movements better.

Some have improved, while others have taken quite a bit of time to get up to speed. Mike and I both know our next challenge will be getting the new group of ship's boys we plan on picking up in Kingston.

As we recant our stories to one another, Dustin brings up an idea for tomorrow, "We need to get our ears pierced", he tells us.

"Yes, we definitely should!" Lucas agrees, Will, Mike and I just shake our heads.

"What do we need holes in our heads for?" Mike asks, giving Dustin an incredulous look.

"It's tradition like" he explains. "Yeah, maybe for pirates", I say.

Dustin scoffs at me, "Look at Jonathan and Steve, they both have rings in their ears!" he argues.

We all give Dustin a small grin, "Okay Dustin, if you can find us a spot to get a needle rammed into our ears, then we'll do it", I say crossing my arms.

"Yes!" Dustin exclaimed as he pumps his fist in the air.

We shake our heads at his enthusiasm, we stick together for the most part for the rest of the day. Just like old times.

The glorious land of Kingston comes into view in the early afternoon of the next day. We are all leaning against the railing looking about the tropical country.

Instead of having to wait for rowboats to take us ashore, there is a lot more docking, allowing for the *Hawk* to mozy on up to the gangway. We are off of the boat within ten minutes.

There's a large crowd of people about the streets, almost like a carnival. People are laughing and there's music pouring from all directions.

Mike and I manage to get seperated from Dustin, Lucas and Will in the large crowd. Which isn't hard to do in the onslaught of people around us. Besides, I think Dustin and Lucas have something dastardly on their minds, and Will is along for the ride, giving Mike and I some time to ourselves.

We walk close to one another as we explore the colorful streets, I'm carrying my seabag against my back, I hoist it up a bit as it slinks across my back.

Mike gives a curious look, "Why did you bring your seabag with you?" he asks.

I respond by giving him a wicked look and a grinning face, "You'll see" I answer simply. He continues to stare after me, but follows nonetheless.

We make our way up past the market streets and onto a pleasant hillside. Aside from the trees, there are many roaming hills.

We walk up a nearby hill that I spotted in which had numerous bushes and trees standing at its top.

I walk towards the bushes and turns towards Mike, "I'm going to change, you stay right here and turn around" I say and give him a level look.

Mike rolls his eyes and gives me a look, I motion with my finger for him to turn, he sighs and does so.

I jump behind the bushes, and attempt to hide myself the best I can. I peak out a bit to make sure Mike is turned away, I can see that he has his arms folded, but he is gazing out towards the ocean, *good boy*, I think to myself as I turn towards my seabag.

I reach my hand in and pull out my blue dress that I have been working tirelessly on since I've known we would be going to land soon. As soon as I had known, an idea struck me quickly, and I grinned at the thought.

I quickly whip off my shirt and unbutton my vest, which feels so good to finally let my chest breath a bit.

My pants are next, and finally I pull my dress over my head. It fits perfectly, and I tie the small drawstring just under my chest into a nice bow. I pull my hair out from my tie and fluff it in the wind.

It is now past my shoulders as it curls this way and that. I tuck my sailor gear into my seabag and stuff the bag deep into the bushes.

I step out from the bushes, Mike hears my rustling and he turns his head towards me. I could have sworn his eyes could have burst from

his head as his mouth hangs open.

I give him a grand smile, "So, Mike," I say, and I stand and cock my hip. "What do you think of your saucy sailor girl now?"

Mike approaches me, his eyes taking me in, and one word escapes his mouth, "Beautiful", he breathes.

I look down at the ground. I'm suddenly flustered by the warmth of his gaze. "Ah, I bet you say that to all the girls", I say.

Mike shakes his head as he looks deep into my eyes and pulls me close, "No, El. You are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen or ever will see. I know I will never be happier than I am at this moment".

My eyes fill with tears at his words, he brings his head down to meet mine, we share a brief sweet kiss, and we break apart, and I start to pull away taking his hand.

"Come on Mike, for this one day, for now, we are going to be as a boy and girl, out on the streets" I say as he follows a wide grin on his face.

We walk back down towards the quieter section of the town, to avoid being spotted by the boys and other members of the crew. We find a little cafe on the outskirts and we go in and find a table in the gloom.

Mike pulls out my chair for me, which shows he did have some manners as a youth, he sits down next to me, we intertwine our hands on top of the table.

A large woman comes over and beams at us and asks what we'd like to have, and Mike asks for her to bring us some food and wine. The woman nods her head and heads off.

"The boys will never come out this far," I say looking about. It's deliciously cool in here. And quiet. And dim.

Mike shakes his head as he squeezes my hand, "I don't care if they do, this is a moment for you and I" he says.

I blush at his words and he leans in close as we cuddle against one another, reveling in this moment of peace, where we can be just as we want to.

The women comes back with our food and wine, "Now, now, children plenty o' time for that. Eat up now."

Everyone in the place seems to be grinning and winking at us. Both Mike and I blush at the fact.

We dig into our meal which is a spicy chicken and rice mix. We both revel at the unique taste having had to live off the same meal for longer than we like to count.

We finish our meal and wipe our messy hands into our napkins. I finish off my wine, "Do you want another?" Mike asks.

I shake my head, "No, let's go back outside in the world, you and me under the sun" I say giving him a look.

Mike nods enthusiastically, he pays for both of our meals, even though I try to insist, he pushes my shilling away, as he pays. I grin at his bravado.

We go back out into the beaming sunlight, we squint at the harshness of the glare after being in the dim lit building. But Mike grabs my hand as we venture into the streets.

We stop here and there, marveling at the unique gifts and trades that Kingston has to offer. We stop and listen to musicians play as well. The best part of the whole experience, is getting to be so close with Mike, without having to worry about getting caught.

Our hands swing back and forth between us, the sun is getting a bit low. We come to a low wall in the curve of the road we had been traveling on. The streets are like steps up the hillside, and one street level is above the rooftops of the street below. We pause there and turn towards one another and come together and....

"Hey, Mike!" We both jerk our heads around, and there, three streets below, are Dustin, Lucas and Tink.

Dustin is shouting, "It's Mike, and he's got a girl!"

I look down at the boys, and I see Will's eyes go wide in horror, recognizing me in a heartbeat. I think fast.

I grab Mike by his shirtfront and hiss, "Do what I say. Step up on the wall. Point to them and smile real broad and pretend you're telling me that they're your mates!"

He does it. He gets up on the wall. He gives me his hand and I get up on the wall too. He points, he smiles and he mouths to me, "Those are my mates."

I take it from here. I turn to them and smile real big and I wave quickly, as my dress ruffles in the breeze. I put on a fake accent I've heard some other females gibber as we've walked the streets, "Allo, freens or Mikey! 'E ees most wonderful boy, yes, I theenk I lof heem!"

Mike turns and gives me a playful look, I can tell he's enjoying this. I look back towards the street and the boys are looking thunderstruck.

"I em mos' sor-ree I cannot stay to meet you var-ee preety boys but I mus' go. My papa weel keel me eef 'e see me here with Mikey!"

I turn back to Mike and say, "I'm about to make you a legend, my dear." And I take his face in my hands and kiss him long and slow up there on that little wall with my lovely dress blowing about me. I feel Mike tighten his hold against me, as he moans into my mouth. Our tongues slipping against one another.

After what feel like an eternity, but not long enough, we break apart, staring softly into each others eyes.

He looks a bit dumbstruck himself, so I place one last kiss on his cheek and jump down from the wall.

I whisper to him, "Now, you walk down toward them and I'll go back and change and catch up with you" I say.

Mike's giving me a longing look but he nods his head and watches me go with those big heart eyes of him.

I sigh as I make my way back up the hill, skipping and swishing my hips, knowing he's still watching. Today couldn't have gone any better.

"You dog. You houd. You lucky bastard. It's not fair. It's not bleedin' fair!" Dustin spews angrily as we make our way through the streets.

I had just met up with them, back in my sailor gear, my sea bag slung against my shoulder.

Will is shaking his head at me and gives me a *seriously* look, I can't help but blush and tuck my head, smiling at Mike's and mine's excursion.

"Who is she, what..." Dustin starts and Mike breaks in, "She's just a local girl, that's all. A simple girl, really" he defends.

"But what did you..." Dustin tries again, but Mike shakes his head, "Now, now, Dustin, you know a gentleman never talks about things like that," he says, looking off all dreamy.

"And where were you during all of this?" Dustin demands of me. "I had to sit and wait in the bloody tavern while he was off with the tart" I say looking out all angry like from under my cap.

"And she was a *real* girl, too" Lucas wails, with his arms up, "Not one you have to pay for. A *real* girl".

"She is certainly real" Mike says, "Every lovely inch of her" he coos.

I again hide my blushing face, as we make our way through the marketplace, as Dustin continues to complain.

I try to not listen to his bantering, as Mike gives me knowing glances here and there, and I try not to smile.

Finally, Dustin gives up and let's out a long breath, "Anyways", he begins, "We didn't have any luck with the local women like Mike here, but, we found a place for earrings" he says as his face brightens.

Yay! Another chapter done, I got busy last night so I didn't have time to finish it and post it yesterday, but I figured it would be good to have a couple days in between, since, I probably won't be posting again till Monday or Tuesday.

Again, I hope you understand what I was trying to say in the beginning, and I hope you are all still enjoying this story, as I know, I am!

As always, please REVIEW! I adore hearing from you guys!

17. Symbol of Love

I have to say how awesome each and every one of you are! Your reviews are so heartfelt and warm my heart! There are so many of you that review each time, and I can't thank you enough! It really makes an author feel special when they get reviews on their stories.

Also, I'm sorry if I make some mistakes with the third person, vs. first person point of view. I take no offense to when it gets pointed out and I appreciate it very much. It's so easy to switch over sometimes, that I forget to check back. So thank you for letting me know! :)

Ok, onto the next chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things* or *Bloody Jack*.

Mike's Point of View:

The days stretch on as we get closer to Kingston, for we are all anxiously awaiting to finally step foot on land once again.

El and I have been working tirelessly on the cutlasses, her heart is definitely more into than I am. For, I find it a bit tiring doing the same thing over and over again, but for El, the repetition seems to zone her out.

When she's focusing on her cutlasses, I sometimes stop and take a moment to take her in. I can't help but watch as each of her movements are identical and precise. But, I also take in her appearance as well.

A little voice in the back of my head sometimes screams at me for not noticing her more girlish demeanor, sooner. And I often think of how big of an idiot I was for not realizing she was a girl all along.

But, I do have to give El some credit in how she managed to fool us for so long. And I can't be too hard on myself, for it seems like no one else on the ship has noticed her either, and if someone did, I'm sure

they wouldn't keep it to themselves.

I count my lucky stars though, for, I couldn't imagine what would happen if she did get discovered and what would happen to her. A shiver goes down my spine, thinking of what would happen. But, I made up my mind long ago, that, if something happened to her, then I would follow her and we would live our lives together. Figuring it out as we go.

As if she can sense my eyes on her, El stops her movements mid swing, and she looks up at me. I startle a bit, knowing I just got caught. She gives me a little smile, "What are you looking at?" she asks coyly.

I look away, a red blush forming on my cheeks, I shake my head, "Nothing" I reply, resuming my motions of polishing the current cutlass I hold in my hand.

I can tell she is still looking at me, so I look up and give her a questioning look, "What?" I ask.

She shakes her head and smiles at me, "You're such a dork" she simpers as she returns to her work.

I smile at her words, "I may be a dork, but I'm your dork", I dish back to her.

Even though El is looking down I know she's rolling her eyes at me. She doesn't say anything and continues to work. I don't say anything either, but a grin is still plastered on my face, thinking of how lucky I am to have found a girl as amazing as El.

Today, we are finally making port in Kingston. The sun is shining bright, the sea is calm and a rich blue color. Anticipation swells about the ship, since this time we are pulling up to the gangplank, allowing for most of the crew to go aboard.

El and I stand near one another, we give each other knowing looks out of the corners of our eyes.

Finally, we are docked, we wait again, and once we're given the all

clear, the crew of the *Hawk* excitedly make their way down the gangplank and onto the dusty streets of Kingston.

Dustin, Will, Lucas, El and I try to stay together, however, from the busy streets and the chaos of men that are pushing us along, El and I easily slip away from them. Not that Dustin, Lucas and Will notice our absence, for I'm sure they have something else in mind that they are searching for.

We walk close to one another as we explore the colorful streets, I'm observing each and every stand, marveling at the wonders that each small town holds.

Out of the corner of my eye I watch as El hoists her sea bag up onto her shoulders as it slinks down her back.

I give her a curious look, "Why did you bring your seabag with you?" I ask my unsaid question that I've had in my head since we've walked off the ship.

She gives me that mischievous look that I have come to love as she says, "You'll see", as she walks a bit ahead of me, I stare after her, but continue to follow, intrigued as to what she has planned.

We make our way up past the market streets and onto a pleasant hillside. Aside from the trees, there are many roaming hills.

We walk up a nearby hill that is fairly steep, the cool grass is welcome under my dusty feet.

I watch as El makes her way towards some large bushes, she observes them for a bit, then turns towards me, "I'm going to change, you stay right here and turn around" she says, giving me a leveled look.

I roll my eyes and give her a look, but then she motions with her finger for me to turn around, I sigh, and do as she says.

My eyes scan the horizon as I cross my arms over my chest. I hear the rustling of the bushes behind me, signaling that El is definitely up to something.

I try to stop my mind from wandering to what El is doing behind the

bushes. The very hormonal voice inside my head comes out for a bit, but I attempt to push him back down.

The intense moments and fierce kisses we have been sharing, make it extremely difficult for that side of me to stay put. More than once have I let him out, but as always, El is the rational one between us.

I know she is right in every sense. A child between us would only end up in disaster, at least for right now.

But, that boy inside me can't wait for the day we can share those moments and actually be open as a boy and girl, married, and able to express our love willingly, without fear of her discovery.

I sigh at my thoughts, but am drawn from them when I hear a rustling behind me, I turn my head slightly, and my breath is taken away. I'm pretty sure my eyes have exploded from my head and my mouth is hanging on the ground, but I can't help it when El steps out from behind the bushes.

She's wearing a grand smile as she twists about, "So, Mike," she says, cocking her hip, "What do you think of your saucy sailor girl now?"

I approach her slowly, taking in her stunning look. She's wearing the lovely blue dress that I recognize as the one she had been working on the day she told me her secret.

I watch as the wind blows about, ruffling her dress in just the right way. Her hair is flowing and free, as it curls about her head, I don't think I've ever seen something so beautiful, so I tell her.

"Beautiful", I breathe giving her a warm gaze. She looks down at the ground, a bit flustered "Ah, I bet you say that to all the girls", she says

I'm taken aback from her words, and I shake my head, I look deep into her brown eyes and pull her flush against my chest, "No, El. You are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen or ever will see. I know I will never be happier than I am at this moment", I tell her honestly.

I watch as her face goes from endearment to surprise, assuming that she's never been told that by anyone. Her eyes glisten at my words, I bring my head down to meet her, we share a brief sweet kiss, and we

break apart, she pulls away a bit, a mischievous smile on her face as she pulls gently at my hand.

"Come on Mike, for this one day, for now, we are going to be as a boy and girl, out on the streets" she says and I follow eagerly behind her a wide grin on my face.

We walk back down towards the quieter section of the town, to avoid being spotted by the boys and other members of the crew. We find a little cafe on the outskirts and we go in and find a table in the gloom.

As we enter the small establishment, I quickly move towards a chair that El stands next to and I pull out the chair for her. Trying to show her my manners of my youth. She gives me a bashful smile, as I sit down next to her. We intertwine our hands together on the top of the table.

A large woman comes over and beams at us and asks what we'd like to have, and I ask for her to bring us some food and wine. The woman nods her head and heads off.

"The boys will never come out this far," El says looking about. I notice even with her bravado, she still seems a little tense and unsure. I know she fears us being spotted but I shake my head at her words.

I squeeze her hand, and she looks at me, "I don't care if they do, this is a moment for you and I" I say, giving her a warm look.

She blushes at my words, and I love watching them tint each time I flatter her. She leans close into me as we cuddle against each other. I place my head a top of hers, and give it a small kiss, releshing in this moment alone.

The women comes back with our food and wine, "Now, now, children plenty o' time for that. Eat up now."

Everyone in the place seems to be grinning and winking at us. El and I blush at the fact.

We dig into our meal which is a spicy chicken and rice mix. I'm surprised by the bold flavor that the dish holds, I can tell El is enjoying it as well. Especially since we spend day in and day out

eating the same bland meal each day.

We finish our meal and wipe our messy hands into our napkins. I watch as El finishes her wine and ask, "Do you want another?"

She shakes her head at me, "No, let's go back outside in the world, you and me under the sun" she says giving me a meaningful look.

I nod enthusiastically, and we go to pay for the meal. As El hands the woman her shilling, I press her hand away, holding out two of my own shillings. "I've got it" I say.

She looks at me, a bit surprised as she shakes her head, trying to move her hands towards the woman, "No it's fine Mike, I can pay for mine", she says.

I hold onto her hand and give it a tight squeeze, "Please let me pay, it's our first time out together, and I'd like to pay for it" I whisper giving her an earnest look.

El doesn't seem to know what to do, but she finally gives in and lets me pay. I grin widely as I pay for our meals. I turn and look at El who is giving me a wide smile, I feel one spreading across my face as well.

We go back out into the beaming sunlight, we squint at the harshness of the glare after being in the dim lit building. I steadily grab onto El's hand as we venture out into the streets.

We stop here and there, marveling at the unique gifts and trades that Kingston has to offer. We stop and listen to musicians play as well. Every time we stop and look about, I can't help but watch her expression each time. Her face grows more and more excited each time we stop. I feel my heartbeat wildly against my chest, knowing that this moment cannot be ruined.

Our hands swing back and forth between us, the sun is getting a bit low. We come to a low wall in the curve of the road we had been traveling on. The streets are like steps up the hillside, and one street level is above the rooftops of the street below. We pause there and turn towards one another and come together and....

"Hey, Mike!" We both jerk our heads around, and there, three streets below, are Dustin, Lucas and Tink.

Dustin is shouting, "It's Mike, and he's got a girl!"

I feel myself panic a bit, not really knowing what to do, I know in mere moments the boys will want to come storming up the hill, and I know they are not that oblivious, they will notice El in a heartbeat.

But, as always, El is quick on her feet, she turns towards me, grabs my shirtfront and pulls me close, she hisses, "Do what I say. Step up on the wall. Point to them and smile real broad and pretend you're telling me that they're your mates!"

I don't hesitate and bend to her command. I step up on the wall and reach out for her lovely hand, I point down to the boys with a wide grin and I mouth to her, "Those are my mates."

El takes it from here, and I'm near blown away by her performance. She turns to them, all excited and gives them a grand wave, I watch as she revels in this moment as her gorgeous dress ruffles in the wind. I sit back and enjoy her show.

El puts on an adorable Kingston accent as she yells out to the boys, "Allo, freens or Mikey! 'E ees most wonderful boy, yes, I theenk I lof heem!"

I turn and give her a playful look, my heart thunders even more so when she says she loves me. I look back towards the street and the boys are looking thunderstruck, I can't but feel myself swell with pride at this sweet girl.

"I em mos' sor-ree I cannot stay to meet you var-ee preety boys but I mus' go. My papa weel keel me eef 'e see me here with Mikey!" she says, I chuckle a bit at my new nickname.

She turns back to me, and gives me a bit of a lustful look as she whispers, "I'm about to make you a legend, my dear." And she takes my face in her hands and she kisses me long and slow. I feel myself melt against her, as her soft lips meld against mine again and again. So, I pull her tight against me and I can't help but moan into her

delicious mouth. I feel our mouths open as our tongues swirl against each other.

After what feel like an eternity, but not long enough, we break apart, staring softly into each others eyes.

I feel a bit dumbstruck and lightheaded. I know that this girl will be the end of me someday. She gives we a wild grin as she sneaks in one more kiss upon my cheek, I sigh, watching her every move.

She jumps down from the wall and then whispers, "Now, you walk down toward them and I'll go back and change and catch up with you" I say.

I give her a longing look, truly not wanting this moment to end between us, but I nod and watch her go.

She's skipping a bit, and swishing her hips slightly, knowing that she's doing this on purpose I let out a low growl. *She'll pay for that later*, I think to myself. I turn and make my way down to the still gaping boys.

I can't help but feel a swelling in my chest and a skip in my own step. The boys are running up to me anxiously awaiting to hear about my little rendezvous with a, *not so*, local girl.

After the boys catch up to me, they are immediately bombarding me with questions and envious looks.

They ask me where I met her, what did we do, and why didn't I introduce them to her the moment we met. I answer them as subtle as I can.

I notice that Will is asking me questions as well, knowing that if he doesn't ask, something will seem suspicious. I can't help but marvel as to how intuitive and quick witted this boy is sometimes.

I'm answering their questions back and forth, when suddenly I see El, back in her sailors gear, grumbling and hustling a bit to meet up with us.

As she approaches, she gives me a quick swat on the arm, "Ow" I say rubbing it a bit, thinking she's mad at me, but she gives me a quick wink, "You bastard, you left me!" is all she's able to get in, when the boys barely notice El's return, and their badgering me again.

El backs off from me, as the boys berate me. She seems a little confused, but shrugs and goes along with it.

"You dog. You houd. You lucky bastard. It's not fair. It's not bleedin' fair!" Dustin spews angrily as we make our way through the streets.

"Who is she, what..." Dustin starts and I break in, "She's just a local girl, that's all. A simple girl, really" I defend, wanting El to hear exactly what I think about her

"But what did you..." Dustin tries again, but I shake my head, "Now, now, Dustin, you know a gentleman never talks about things like that," I say, looking off all dreamy.

"And where were you during all of this?" Dustin demands of El. She seems taken back a bit, seeming that Dustin has finally noticed her return.

"I had to sit and wait in the bloody tavern while he was off with the tart" she says looking out all angry like from under her cap.

"And she was a *real* girl, too" Lucas wails, with his arms up, "Not one you have to pay for. A *real* girl".

"She is certainly real" I say, "Every lovely inch of her" I coo, wanting to make the boys a little jealous, but also letting El know, just how much I think of her lovely body.

I glance over at her and see her hiding her blushing face, I can't help but smile widely at her reaction.

Dustin continues to complain as we make our way through the marketplace, each of us trying to ignore his complaining.

Finally, though, Dustin gives up and let's out a long breath, "Anyways", he begins, "We didn't have any luck with the local women like Mike here, but, we found a place for earrings" he says as his face

brightens.

El's Point of View

Dustin leads us down to the goldsmith's shop he had found in the middle of the market square. It's a quaint little shop, and we all can't help but marvel at all the shiny little trinkets that decorate the shop.

We look around a bit, until Dustin calls us over to a corner, where, a box of golden hooped earrings sat piled together. The hoops were still open a bit, so that they could be looped through our ears and then soldered closed, forever cementing them onto our poor ears.

The shop is small, and there is a small forge glowing in the corner. Dustin, Lucas and Will make their way over to the blacksmith, not acting so brave now that the deed is to be commenced.

I go to watch them, however, Mike grabs my arm and motions me with his head back towards the forge. We stand by the glowing embers, hidden away from the sight of the other boys.

I'm not really sure what he's up to, so I give him a curious look, but then he gently takes my left hand in his and he takes his hoop and puts it on my ring finger and lifts up my hand kisses it. My heart melts right then and there.

I look up at him in the fireglow and I can feel the tears starting to pool in my eyes, one escapes and trails down my cheek. Mike smiles and wipes the tear away gently.

"I know this isn't a real ring", he says hardly above a whisper, "But, I want it to symbolize that one day, and hopefully one day soon, I will give you a proper ring, and you will be my one and only", he says.

"I promise to marry you, Eleanor Brenner, and you will be Mrs. Wheeler" he finishes.

I so want to wrap him up in my arms right here and now and kiss him all over, but, I know I can't, and I can only give him a broad smile.

And I repeat his motions as well, I reach out and grab his left hand and place my hoop on his ring finger, bringing it to my lips and giving it a silent kiss.

We stare into each others eyes for a moment, he leans down, but I stop him, knowing that we could easily get caught. He sighs, knowing I'm right. We step away from the forge and dark fire.

We make our way to the blacksmith and Dustin, Lucas and Will, who are each admiring their earrings outside the shop.

Mike and I both decide to get our left ear pierced, so that it will symbolize our promise to one day marry each other and to stay honest and true to only each other.

We approach the blacksmith who shoves a needle through our earlobes and we take the rings off from our fingers and he shoves them through. Then he takes a hot iron and welds the ring shut, and I swear I didn't feel a thing.

I also swear to myself that right then and there, that I will never, ever, take off that ring.

Both feeling a bit light on our feet after our oh, so lovely day together and the promises that we made to each other, Mike and I are a bit off from the other boys. Each zoning off as we recount the day.

I notice that we are all playing with our new earrings, each of us reaching up and touching the golden rings.

Out of the corner of my eye, as we walk, I can see Mike giving me longingly stares, and I want to give them back, but I be sure to be careful, not wanting Dustin and Lucas to catch on.

The sun has long set over the horizon, and the streets are glowing with illuminated candles, looking like fireflies scattering about the dark streets.

We make our way back to the ship, we have our usual dinner, and then we are wrapped up in our hammocks.

I listen as the other boys and men around us let out small grunts and snores echo across the walls of the ship.

My mind is racing of today's adventure. I find myself unconsciously rubbing my earring, thinking of the day Mike and I can finally marry.

As if he's read my mind, I feel our hammock shift a bit, as quietly as he can, Mike flips himself, and I find he is laying on top of me.

I chuckle a bit as his unsteadiness, as he tries to steady himself. We let the hammock settle a bit before we try anything. Attempting to hide our sneakiness with the occasional movement that every hammock makes throughout the night.

It's a cloudy night anyways and the moon is nowhere to be seen, so we are hidden by the darkness around us.

I feel Mike brush his nose against my ear as his dark hair tickles my face, "I couldn't not go to sleep without a goodnight kiss" he whispers into my ear.

I reach out to feel his face and move his ear towards mine so that only he can hear, "I know, I wish we could be somewhere else now" I say a bit more lustful than I meant.

Mike growls into my ear and lets out a quite breath, "You're driving me insane, El" he breathes into my ear.

I let out a breathy laugh as quietly as I can, "Once we are married, you can have me anyway you want" I whisper.

I swear I can hear his heart stop and his breath catches in his throat, he doesn't move, and I find myself a bit concerned, but then his mouth is on mine, even in the dark, they come together like magnets.

He kisses me hungrily as quietly as he can. I wrap my arms slowly around his neck bringing him closer. He presses himself into me, and I can feel his excitement.

Even in the moment, we know we have to be as silent as possible, but our mouths move against each other in a fierce battle. We're careful to not remove our lips, knowing the smacking will not go unnoticed.

I know if I let him, Mike would have me right here and then, not caring about who was around. But, I don't, and I pull away from him with quiet movements.

Even in the dark, I can tell his eyes are dark with lust. He breathes out a warm breath, I move up and give him a kiss on his cheek.

"El, I think I love you", Mike says breathlessly, now my breath is caught in my throat. Even though I knew he did, hearing the words are much more endearing.

I smile broadly, "I love you too" I whisper back. Mike chuckles and then he gives me a long sweet kiss.

We break apart again, and Mike moves back to his spot in the hammock, I reach over and intertwine our hands together.

"Night El," Mike whispers into the dark night, "Night Mike", I whisper back. We keep our hands together as we drift off into sleep, dreaming of our lovely day together.

Ah, I really liked this chapter! Hope you liked Mike's point of view with the whole date scene! I know it's a little shorter than usual but I really wanted to get a chapter out today and tomorrow. Sorry I always tend to end with them going to sleep, but it's an easy transition to the next chapter usually.

Let me know what you think! Please REVIEW! I love the feedback!

18. New Recruits

Hey guys! Thanks again for your lovely reviews! Been having fun writing this story and I'm really enjoying where it is going!

Also, just a reminder, this will be my last posting for a couple of days since we are heading out tomorrow until next Monday! So, please be patient as you wait for Chapter 19.

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of View:

Mike and I awake, a bit more blissful than usual with the last days remnants still fresh on our brains and our nightly frisk that keeps our hearts beating.

We lift ourselves up and out of our hammocks, well practiced, where we no longer knock each other off and onto the hard floor beneath us.

We give each other a bit of a flushed smile in greeting this morning, we are about to head up to grab breakfast, until I feel a hand around my arm, I turn and see Will holding me back.

I give him a curious look, "What's wrong?" I ask a little concerned. He shakes his head, and pulls me a little closer so that only I can hear him, "Can we talk for a minute, just you and me?"

I cast a glance back at Mike who's waiting for me to join him, he meets my eyes, "Hey Mike, I'll meet you up there", I say.

He knows he has to watch his facial expressions, so instead of pouting, he shrugs his shoulders and makes his way up top.

Will continues to pull me towards the side of the ship, where we are out of earshot of anyone else who is lumbering behind. He let's go of my arm and he gives me a leveled look, "What?" I ask him feeling a bit guarded by his look.

He folds his arms in front of him and cocks his eyebrow at me,

"You're asking me, what?" he says accusingly.

"Will, you're going to have to help me out a bit here", I say not really sure as to what he is trying to get at.

He gets closer to me and whispers, "Whatever you and Mike were doing in the hammock last night, didn't go unnoticed".

My eyes widen a bit, "What do you mean?" I asked panicked.

"Look, Lucas and I were almost asleep when we heard your hammock groaning a bit, we thought one of you were just getting up to use the bathroom, your lucky Lucas was just about asleep and didn't really care, but then I heard some interesting sounds as well" he gives me a wary look.

I let out a long sigh, "I'm sorry Will, Mike's jus-", I start before Will cuts me off, "Don't say sorry to me, whatever you two do is your business. What I want you to understand is that you guys are getting real close to being found out, especially if you don't cool it a bit" he says haughty.

I digest his words a bit and slowly nod my head in understanding, "I know. It's just hard sometimes, keeping it a secret".

Will sighs as well, "I know El, but I don't want you getting thrown off the ship" his concern written on his face.

I hang my head, "I'll talk to Mike, we'll have to take it down a notch". Will chuckles, "How about a couple notches?" he jokes.

At this I give him a quick shove and laugh along with him, knowing that Mike and I probably should be more careful with our affections towards one another. With how well everything is going so far, I definitely don't want to be put off the ship.

So, Will and I make our way to the upper deck, where we make our way to the mess hall and meet up with the other boys.

Not long after breakfast, we all make our way out on deck, and I set my eyes on Captain Hopper, who is standing by the railing of the

ship, he is talking with the deacon, along with a group of boys.

As if Captain Hopper feels his eyes on me, he turns and we catch eyes. He smiles a bit and gestures with his hand, "Brenner, Wheeler, get over here!" his booming voice goes across the ship.

Mike and I look at each other, unsure as to what he wants us for, but we hastily make our way over. We stand near the Captain, "Aye, Sir?" I say giving him a questioning look.

He continues to beam at us, he places two giant hands on both mine and El's shoulder and he brings us closer to the boys standing on deck.

"Brenner, Wheeler, these four are our new ships boys" he says, as he gestures his head to the small group of boys.

Mike and I look to the group of smallish boys, they seem a little intimidated, but also excited as well.

"State your names", Captain Hopper grumbles a bit as he speaks to the boys. I take in that they are about the same age we ships boys were when we came onto the *Hawk*, but since we've grown, they seem so little to me.

The one closest to us comes up and says, "The names Murray", I size him up quickly, he's about two head's shorter than me, but seems to have a quick personality to make up for it. He's got dark brown hair and is pretty skinny as well.

"I'm Benjy", says the next little boy, who has a massive head of blonde curls, and brilliant blue eyes.

"My names Lonnie", the tallest of the bunch says, his head holds short brown hair, and he has deep green eyes.

But I have to hold back my squeal of delight when the last little boy introduces himself. "I'm Finny", he says, and I'm immediately enraptured by the little boy because he is the spitting image of a young Mike. The young Finny has a mop of curly black hair and a smattering of freckles across his nose. The only difference between he and Mike, is that he too, has enrapturing blue eyes, unlike Mike's

deep brown eyes that I fell in love with.

I honestly just want to wrap him up into my arms and hold him, but I resist my girlish feelings and settle myself.

Mike speaks first, "It's nice to meet you boys, my names Mike, and this is El", he says as he gestures towards me, I give the boys a wide smile, "Hello", I say to them.

They each let out little 'hellos' as well, as Captain Hopper speaks, "Now listen here, you youngins", Mike and El here will be working with you on swordsmanship" he says. I watch as the boys faces grow with excitement.

"They will also be somewhat of your mentors, but you are expected to listen to anyone older than you, if, you don't want to be keelhauled or whipped for punishment" he states, his lips going to a straight line.

The boys straighten up at this comment as they eye us wearily. Captain Hopper pats our shoulders once more, "You boys are in good hands, these two were ship boys not long ago, and are now fine sailors, respect them", he lets our shoulders go and walks away.

Mike and I turn back towards the boys and we size each other up. I'm starting to feel uncomfortable with the situation, never really spending time with younger kids, even though I was their age not long ago.

Thankfully, Mike takes over, "Alright boys, we won't be doing much today since we are still docked, get to know the ship, explore, but don't get into too much trouble. When El and I are ready we will beckon you", he states simply to the boys.

They all nod their heads in understanding, but they stay rooted to their spots, Mike gives them a questioning look, "Well, go on" he says waving them off.

The boys look at each other, and soon they are off and running, their still young voices squeaking in laughter as they take in the wonder that is the *Hawk*.

Mike and I stare off after them, smiles growing on our faces. "I don't

remember being that small", I tell Mike honestly.

He chuckles, "I know, it's hard to believe it was only four years ago that we stepped on this ship" he says looking at me warmly.

I raise my eyebrows, "*Only*, four years? That's actually quite sometime Mike" I say.

He gives me a look, "I know, but..." he stops then comes close and whispers to me, "I mean, yes, four years is a long time, but the time we've spent together seems so short, when we could have had, much more time", his eyes are a bit watery.

I look at him softly, "I'm sorry, but I had to wait till I knew you felt the same", I tell him honestly.

He simpers, "You don't have to apologize, it did take me a long time to realize that what I felt for you was true, even when you were still a boy to me", he says.

We grin at each other, then break away, we return to the lower deck where our cutlasses are stashed, so that we can begin today's work on them.

We are back out at sea, and have made our way out for a couple of days and the seas are churning like always. Mike and I, the ever salty sailors we are now, are used to the rough movements of the waves as they crash against the ship.

Our young boys, however, are sicker than dogs. They have taken up a small kip close to where ours once was, away from the guns of course. However, there is still not enough room to hang more hammocks, not that Mike and I complain, but little Lonnie complained long and hard the first night out.

Finally, Lucas put a stop to his whining after he threatened to hang him upside down over the ship if he didn't shut up about the sleeping arrangements.

With the new youngins aboard, Mike and I have found that we have to be even more careful when trying to give each other some

affection. For, the young ships boys tend to be everywhere and watching our every moves. We've almost been caught more times than we can count, but a little threat here and there, allows them to move on fairly quickly.

Once the young ships boys have finally gotten their sea legs under them and are no longer spewing their empty stomachs over the side of the ship, we pull them aside and start their lessons.

Obviously, they are a sorry sight to see, and Mike and I spend more time cursing and yelling at them to stop swinging their fake swords around and to pay attention. By the time their lessons are complete, I'm about ready to throw them over the side of the ship myself.

"Were we this bad?" I whisper into Mike's ear after the long training day with the ships boys. He shakes his head, "I don't think so" he answers honestly.

After we dismiss the boys, they run off, waving their fake swords about and causing mischief throughout the ship. I watch as Lonnie and Benjy perry, fairly poorly, against one another. I shake my head in defeat, it's like they aren't even listening.

Whereas Murray and Finny watch off to the side silently, the more well behaved of the four. I watch little Finny's eyes, he being the youngest of the four, he tends to get pushed to the side.

However, he's the only one so far who has shown any progress and shows that he is actually listening to Mike's and mine's instructions.

Anytime he comes near me, I want to scoop him up and hug him till he's blue in the face, because he's just so cute! And I tell Mike this any chance he gets. The first time I pointed out the similarities between them he scoffed.

"Mike, Finny could totally be your twin, or little brother!" I squealed shortly after our first meeting with the young boys.

He looks at me incredulously, and stares, "El, are you kidding me, he looks nothing like me" he says somewhat frustrated.

I stare at him, dumbfounded, "Mike, are you kidding me?" I ask him.

He grumbles a bit, "He's nothing like me", he walks away from me in a huff. I only shake my head after him, chuckling at his immaturity.

And I find Mike quickly eats his words, young Finny is just like him, and the young boy takes a quick liking to him too.

I've enjoyed watching Finny mozy up all close to Mike and ask him some weird or nonsense questions. Mike doesn't seem to notice his little shadow, but I find it adorable.

Mike grows jealous of the young boy too, as I find he has taken a liking to me as well. There's a thought in the back of my mind that thinks Finny might know my secret, just by the way he looks at me and cozies up to me sometimes as well.

But, I find that I wouldn't mind if the young boy would know, or at least have those thoughts in the back of his mind that I'm sure he pushes to the side, finding the ideas ridiculous.

I chuckle when Finny comes close to my side and cuddles in close, and I watch Mike's eyes turn to daggers as he watches our moment together. I raise my eyebrows at him, catching him in the act, and he quickly turns away.

I have broached Mike on the subject of his jealousy, but he rebuffs it everytime, "Jealous? Me?" he says shaking his head aggressively. As we are walking down the stairs to store room, we are heading to check out the new cutlasses the Captain brought aboard when we got to Kingston.

We have finally found five seconds to do so, or else we would have been down to see them much sooner.

"But Mike, you are so jealous of little Finny", I say poking him in the side. He growls at me, "I'm not jealous, I just don't like the way he cuddles up to you like that", he mutters.

I throw my head back and laugh at this statement, "Mike, that's exactly what jealousy is!" I laugh at him. "What, you don't like that little Finny can get all close to me, without anyone thinking anything of it an-" I don't get very far as Mike pushes me roughly against the

stairwell, his hands hold my shoulders roughly.

I'm surprised by his sudden movements, he brings his face close to mine, he's breathing heavily. I stare into his dark, intense stare. "Yes, okay, I don't like the kid getting so close to you" he growls at me.

"But, your mine El, and only mine" he breathes his warm breath into my face. I blink at him and open my mouth, but no words come out, not really sure what to say.

He lets out a breath and loosens his hold, "I'm sorry" he says looking deep into my eyes, "It's just so hard, I hate not being able to hold you, and love you the way I so desperately want to" he shivers.

I relax against him, understanding where he is coming from. I know, I've been frustrated too by the lack of contact we've had since we've been on the ship, from our new duties to sword practices. Our moments alone have become scarce, and the feeling of wanting to be close to one another grows each day.

I place my hands onto his face and I give him wide eyes, "Soon, Mike, we will be together and nothing and no one will stop us" I tell him earnestly.

Our eyes flutter against each others, "I love you", he whispers, and I shiver at his words, loving each time he tells me those three words.

I give him a wide grin, "I love you too", I whisper back. And then we're kissing, gentle, yet sweet in the moment.

It's not a quick or heated kiss, but instead it invokes our feelings for one another. We hold onto each other tightly, our hands moving against each others bodies. We get lost in each others embrace, forgetting where we are, and suddenly, a light shines down on us, and we jump apart rapidly.

"What the hell!?" a familiar voice breaks us from our moment. My heart is in my throat, and I can barely breathe.

"Mike, El?" another recognizable voice works its way to our ears. Mike and I watch in horror, as Dustin and Lucas are staring at us from the bottom of the steps that lead to the stores, stare up at us

with shock written across their faces.

My heart lowers a bit from my throat, knowing that if we were to be caught, I'd rather it be by our friends, then some other crew members.

We all stand there a bit, not really knowing what is supposed to happen next, but as always, Dustin breaks the silence, "Were you two kissing!?" he asks sputtering.

Mike immediately tries to cover, "NO! Of course not, we we-" he tries, but I hold out a hand to stop him. I know we've been caught, and there's no more hiding it.

I let out a long breath and step down a couple of steps, so that I'm more level with Dustin and Lucas, when I meet them, they're not sure what to say, so I speak, "I think we need to tell you two something".

We're up in the mizzentop, since the new ships boys have discovered our old foretop hangout, and we've been booted from our old hangout.

I tell Dustin and Lucas to go find Will and to meet us up in the mizzentop in five minutes. In the stairwell, is where I tell them this, and I headed back up, where I grabbed Mike's hand and I pull him towards our next destination.

Now, the original five ships boys, sit about, not really saying anything, but instead just stare at one another, the awkwardness growing thicker by the moment.

Finally, Will speaks, "What's this all about?" he says slowly looking between Mike and I, and Dustin and Lucas.

Lucas speaks his thoughts first, "We were coming from the ships stores, and we were about to head up the stairs, when we caught these two...well..." he tries, but he looks down abashed by what he caught Mike and I doing.

Will catches on quickly and stares at Mike and I, "Seriously?" he practically yells at us, Mike and I bow our heads a bit. "I thought I

told you two to take it down a notch!?" he exclaims with his hands in the air.

Dustin turns on Will, "You knew?" he asks flabbergasted. "Of course I knew, El and I used to live together", he explains.

Both Dustin and Lucas are shaking their heads in disbelief, "So, wait. You knew that El was, *that way*" Lucas says slowly, giving Will a leveled look.

Will gives him a look and rolls his eyes, "Of course I did, I've known since we first met", he tries.

Dustin and Lucas seemed lost, "Wait, were you guys...? Lucas asks unsure, this time both Will and I answer, our faces turning to disgust, "Ew, of course not, I would never think of being with him, he's my brother" I say, very grossed out.

"Yeah, and El's always been like a sister to me so-" Will starts his explanation, before Dustin and Lucas nearly jump out of their skin as they exclaim, "Sister!", so loudly, I'm sure the whole crew heard them.

Will looks at them curiously, "Yeah, sister, El's a girl" he states matter of factly, shrugging his shoulders.

I watch as Dustin and Lucas seem to relax a bit, leaning back against the wall of the mizzentop. Dustin sputters with his next words, "So wait..that means...and that El...and he's a *she*...and...ugh my head" he tries as he holds his head with his hands.

Lucas then finally makes eye contact with me, "So, you're actually a girl?" he asks, waiting for the answer.

I sigh, and then look between Mike and Will, they nod their heads at me, so I pull off my cap, and pull my long hair from its tie. My hair catches in the wind and blows about me. I give them a wide, toothy grin, "The names, *Eleanor*, not Elliot, and yes, I am a girl" I state, as I watch Dustin and Lucas hang their mouths open once again.

"But, how, why?" Lucas tries to ask. So, between Will and I, we explain our story, how I disguised myself as a boy to pass voyage on

the ship, and how we ended up here. Then with Mike, he and I explain how he found out and why I told him.

Dustin and Lucas remain silent through the whole retelling, their eyes wide by the time we make it to the end.

"The girl in Kingston!" Dustin exclaims, startling us a bit. I blush a bit, and duck my head. Mike looks over to me and smiles widely, "Yes Dustin, that was actually El" he says, grabbing my hand and giving it a squeeze.

"This whole time you two have been-" Dustin says gesturing between the two of us. "Not the whole time, if you were listening" I say to the poor boy.

"Like we said, it's been almost a year since I found out" Mike explains once again.

"Why didn't you tell us?" Lucas asks, sounding a bit hurt, and I frown at his words, feeling a little sheepish that I hadn't disclosed my secret to them.

I sigh, "I'm sorry guys, but I had to keep it as quiet as possible, I didn't want everyone on the ship knowing my true identity" I explain giving them a sorrowful look.

Dustin harrumphs, and I turn to look at him, "It's not fair, how did Mike get the girl" he says with folded arms.

Mike and I look at each other with small smiles, our hands still clasped together. "It, just happened Dustin, you can't help who you fall in love with" I explain gently.

Mike squeezes my hand tighter at my words, "But, wait, you guys share a hammock, so the other night when-ugh!" Lucas starts, been then gets a disgusted look on his face as to where his mind begins to go.

At this, Mike and I flush as red as a tomato and we look down bashfully, "It's not like that, Lucas, we haven't-" Mike tries, but I cut him off, although the boys now know my secret and that Mike and I are together, they don't need to know everything that goes on in our

relationship.

"Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god!", Dustin begins to panic a bit at what Lucas is getting at. Mike rolls his eyes, "Oh, enough guys, it's not like that".

"Ugh, but you guys probably are", Lucas says taken back a bit. We shake our heads at their immaturity.

"Okay guys, but the real issue here is you need to keep your big mouths quiet!" I tell them strictly wagging a finger in front of their faces.

I stand, "Up. All of you" I say, motioning for the boys to stand, they follow, curious.

I show my tattoo to them, "You need to all swear, on your tattoo, that, no matter what anyone says or ask, you need to keep my secret", I look about all of them, they look at each other, but soon Mike pulls his pants down enough to expose his tattoo and places it near mine.

"I swear", he says looking at me earnestly. Will follows suit, "I swear" coming to my other side.

Dustin and Lucas look at each other, debating, I hold my breath, knowing that this moment will decide if our Brotherhood really meant something to them.

But, they brandish their tattoos as well and join us in the circle, I feel my heart swell.

"I swear", both boys say, grinning at me. I stare into their eyes, my eyes watering a bit, "Thank you", is all I can manage to say to them.

As we stand in our little circle together, I can't help but feel the nostalgia of when we first got these tattoos, now, a handful of years ago, but it seems just like yesterday.

Just as our tattoos are permanent on our skin, so is the trust, honor and love we have between one another. Our Brotherhood stands true between us, and it will never be broken.

Ok! Dustin and Lucas now know! I really wanted to have this reveal before I left! I've got a long drive ahead and I hope I'll come up with some new ideas. I know where I'm going, but there's one plot point I REALLY want to bring in, just need to work it in just right.

I also hope you liked the new ships boys, tried to sneak in some familiar names and changed them a bit ;)

So, my lovely readers, I will see you in a week! Please be patient with my next update, you are all awesome!

And as always PLEASE REVIEW! I so love reading your reviews!

19. A Discovery

Hey! I'm back! Sorry it took so long, but as you all know I was on vacation and didn't have anytime to work on the story! But, I was able to think as to where I wanted to go next! We just got back on Monday, we had a 13 hour drive and I was super busy at work yesterday, so I didn't have the time to write, so hopefully getting this chapter out today!

Thank you as always for all of the awesome reviews! One away from 100, which is amazing! You are all so wonderful and your reviews make me feel so good about this story!

So, please enjoy this next installation of Stranger Tides!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack.

El's Point of View:

Things aboard the ship have been moving fairly well. Our young ships boys have *finally* been making some progress with their swordsmanship, even if they come close to poking one of their friends eyes out. But, they are becoming more diligent in their training. And I have a feeling it is because they have met the paddle across their rears a couple times, and their starting to straighten out a bit.

One thing that has changed is the way Dustin and Lucas treat me, and it's becoming quite bothersome actually. I've found that they examine me much more....thoroughly.

This is especially true when I walk by them, or we are chatting about. I'll watch them, as they attempt to look at me up and down, out of the corner of their eyes. I've swatted them across their heads more times than they can count. And when Mike catches them, it's usually a swift kick to their groin, and a few choice words as well.

I can't help but feel a bit proud at Mike's actions. I love seeing him so protective over me, even if it is from our stupid friends, who don't understand the female creature.

But, Mike tends to give them the hint, especially when it's just the five of us, we sit real close to one another, and sometimes I'll rest my head against his shoulder, and he'll give me a kiss on top of my head.

When the boys get real nosy, Mike will sometimes swoop in and give me a long hard kiss and pull me in close. Or sometimes I will do the same. The first time I did this was when Dustin was getting real smart about mine and Mike's relationship.

We were up in the mizzentop, it was just after super and we were chatting away, when Dustin raised a question, "Say El, why did you choose Mike anyways?" he asks gesturing to the boy beside me.

I turn towards Mike who's frowning at Dustin now, who stands and gives a grand gesture to himself, "When, you could have had all of this?" he wiggles his eyebrows a bit at me.

I roll my eyes at his cheekiness, "Dustin, you can't help who you fall in love with" I say to him, which I feel like I've told him a million times.

But he doesn't relent, "Oh come on. That's just an excuse" he says brandishing his hand at me. "Why can't we just share?" he asks shrugging his shoulders.

I give him an incredulous look, "Seriously, Dustin?" I say, raising my eyebrows high. He nods his head in all seriousness, "Yeah, I mean, why can't we have you like, every two days?" he suggests.

Honestly, I want to push him out of the mizzentop, but I settle with burrowing my face into my hands as I shake my head, I look up at him ready to speak, but Mike is on his feet, lightning quick.

Mike comes up close to Dustin, his face level and stern, Dustin backs away. "You really think El is just some girl to throw around?" he asks seriously.

"Uh-uhm" Dustin stutters, his eyes flitting back and forth, panicked. "El, isn't just 'some girl', like the tramps you and Lucas think about" Mike growls.

I watch intensely as Mike continues to corner Dustin, who seems

afraid now, "We both had an interest in each other, even when I thought she was a boy, you never had those feelings for El. What we have is honest and true" Mike says earnestly.

I feel my heart swell at his words, knowing, that even when I was still a boy in his eyes, he truly cared for me and I'm sure even if I was actually a boy, he would still care for me.

Dustin lets out a breath, "S-Sorry, Mike" he says finally. But Mike shakes his head, "Don't apologize to me, say you're sorry to El" Mike says nodding towards me.

Dustin nods his head, then looks to me, straight in the eyes, "Sorry El, I didn't mean it like that" he says a bit humbly.

"It's okay Dustin, just, you both need to stop with this whole, 'girl' thing" I say as I stand beside Mike.

I take Mike's hand in mine, and he gives me a warm smile. "We enjoy being with each other, and you will all find your match someday" I smile earnestly.

Dustin smiles at this, "You really think I'll find a girl someday?" he questions, unsure.

I place a hand on Dustin's shoulder, our eyes meet, "Of course, and not just some fling, but a real girl, who will love you for everything you are".

Dustin gives me a wide smile, "Thanks El", he says as he sits back down with Lucas and Will who have been observing the whole exchange.

Mike and I follow as we resume our seats, our hands still entwined.

"Besides, I'm sure my girl will think I'm a better kisser than Mike", he teases Mike once again, who lets out a low growl, while Will and Lucas laugh.

I sigh, knowing the poor boy can't catch a break from the three boys now that they have figured out my secret and that they know we are together.

So, I take matters into my own hands, "Who said Mike was a bad kisser?" I say as they all turn to look at me, even Mike and his dopey grin.

I give Mike a look, my eyes sparkling as I grab his face and pull him into a long kiss. I hear the boys groan in protest as we move our lips against each other, smiling against one another.

"Ew, not in front of us!" I hear Will cry, but we continue for a bit more, and I finally pull away, both Mike and I grinning ear to ear.

I look back to the other boys, who look mortified, "If Mike didn't kiss that well, I wouldn't be eager to-" I try to say but Dustin cuts me off, "Okay, okay, we get it, we don't need to know what you two do behind closed doors!" he barks as he continues to cover his eyes.

Mike and I laugh at the boys, hopefully putting an end to their picking and joking. But, knowing the boys, they will continue to harass Mike, but probably when I'm not around. Oh, well.

We've been out to sea for about 3 months since the new ships boys have joined the crew. Will and I have passed our 16th birthdays, as the other boys rapidly approach their 17th. It's amazing to see how far each of us have come and grown.

Will has finally surpassed me in height, if only by an inch, but he still stands shorter than the rest of the boys. Mike is the tallest of them all, his lanky arms and legs have finally caught up with the rest of his body. His chest has filled out, which I remark at everytime I see him without his shirt on. Which I've noticed has been more often, since he caught me staring one day while training the younger boys.

I've noticed that our moments alone together have started to become much more heated. And I'm worried that my senses will start to melt away too. For, the way Mike holds me and moves his hands across my body, it makes my brain melt, and sometimes I let him get away with touches that before I would swat his hand away from.

I know *exactly* what his brain is thinking. And I find my mind going there too, but, I know I have to be the strong one between us,

because I don't want to get figured out, just because we were stupid and I become pregnant with our child.

Our child. It brings a great smile to my face when I think about that as well. I know that one day we will bring a child into this world, and it will be apart of both of us. I try to imagine what the child would look like. My heart prays that they will have Mike's adorable little freckles and his dark eyes. And maybe they will get my light brown hair. I sigh at these thoughts, knowing that the day will come, just not now.

For now, I try to keep our hands tame, and our thoughts, somewhat pure. But, those pure thoughts, I fear, will soon melt away.

As for right now, I focus on the good that is now and continue our days on the ship.

"Murray, parry with your right hand, and right foot, not your left" I command the young boy, who is struggling against his bigger opponent, Benjy.

The boys are very slowly moving through the motions that Mike and I have been teaching them. They are finally, making some steady progress, even if it is slow moving.

"Finny, you've got to be faster!", I whip my head around to look at Mike who is working with Finny and Lonnie.

Lonnie, though slow at first, has started to pick up his pace working with Mike, he is now overpowering little Finny.

Finny is desperately trying to keep up with Lonnie's quick movements, that, even though are a bit clumsy, they are becoming fluid. I've noticed that young Lonnie has also made a couple of his own moves, that are difficult to read for an untrained eye. This is what throws Finny.

"Yield!" Lonnie cries, as he thrusts his sword towards the now off balanced Finny, "Whoa!" Finny cries, as he tumbles to the deck floor, his fake sword skittering off, out of his reach. Lonnie towers over

him, his fake sword in Finny's chest. "Gotcha!" Lonnie cries.

I watch as Finny's deep blue eyes look up to Lonnie's determined face, their little chests puffing from exhaustion. Finny angrily pushes Lonnie's sword away from him, as he slowly gets to his feet.

"You don't have to be so touchy for losing", Lonnie states, watching the young boy get to his feet.

"I'm not mad", Finny growls at the other boy, Lonnie chuckles, "Just because you were the best, and now I am, doesn't mean you have to act like an ass" he says.

Finny rushes to him and shoves Lonnie's chest roughly, sending Lonnie to his butt, skidding across the deck.

Lonnie is a bit shocked at first, but he squints his eyes as he rushes to his feet, "You little twerp!" he yells running towards the young boy, who places his hands in front of his body, waiting for the impact.

But, it never comes, "Enough!", Mike yells, as he runs up between the two boys, placing a hand on each of their chests.

The boys are trying to struggle out of Mike's grasp, but their small stature and Mike's strong figure holds them back.

"He started it!" Finny bellows as he glares daggers at Lonnie, who is trying to reach his hands around Mike to swipe at Finny, "You're just jealous!" Lonnie bellows.

I decide to step in as well, as Benjy and Murray have stopped their practicing, watching their two friends fight. I give Mike a look and he nods, I swoop around to grab Finny, and he does the same with Lonnie, holding them back from each other.

"Calm down, both of you", I try to say as calmly as possible to decrease the boys energy. I'm holding Finny fairly tight as he tries to wriggle from my grasp.

"He just can't stand he's the smallest and the weakest now", Lonnie belts to the young boy. I hear Finny give a loud cry as he tries to break free of my hold, wanting to lunge at Lonnie, but I hold tight.

"That's no way to talk to your friend", I scold Lonnie. "You are both here to learn, to get better, and you do that by supporting one another" I say.

We're all huffing a bit now as the boys are difficult to hold down for Mike and I.

"You're both growing and getting better each time" Mike encourages. "Then why do you only criticize me!" Finny's small voice calls out.

Mike shakes his head, "I don't only-" he tries, but Finny yells out again, "Yes you do!" he yells, and I look down at him, and I see the tears rolling down his face.

"You only bark at me to change! You obviously don't like me!" he cries, this time he breaks free and I panic for a bit, but Finny doesn't charge Lonnie and Mike, but instead runs off towards the back of the cabin.

I sigh, knowing that the young boy was in pain, feeling as if one of his superiors didn't acknowledge him as he so hoped.

I turn to Mike and Lonnie, the older boy lets go of the now calmed Lonnie. Mike's and my eyes meet, I can tell he feels ashamed.

I look back to the three boys standing about, looking at us, thinking of what happens next. I let out a long breath, "That's it for today boys, good work" I say.

The three of them nod quietly, not really sure as to what to do next. So, they return their fake swords to the storage area, and they make their way towards the foretop, I'm sure to mull things over.

Mike's by my side, he's rubbing the back of his neck slowly. He eyes me carefully, "I shouldn't have been so hard on him, it's just-" he stops short, not knowing what he wants to say next.

I place a hand on his shoulder, and our dark eyes meet, I give him a soft smile, "I'll go talk to him" I whisper. Mike frowns, "No, I should", he tries.

I shake my head, "No, let me, he probably doesn't want to even look

at you right now" I give him a sad smile.

Mike nods his head in understanding, "Okay, but let me know how it goes, ok?" he says, turning away. I start to make my way towards where Finny disappeared to, when I hear Mike calling out to me, "El!" I turn, "Tell him...tell him I'm sorry", he looks down.

I give him a smile that he doesn't see, "Don't worry I will", I announce as I continue on my path.

Within minutes, I make my way down towards the lower decks and I listen. Then I hear it, a small sniffing noise.

I realized the little boy was able to get himself in one of the areas that lay behind the ships folds. I smile somewhat fondly. Knowing, this is exactly what I would do when I felt alone or hurt.

I look into the fold, and I see Finny sitting on the hard floor, his knees brought up to his chest. His sniffing muffled against his legs.

"Finny" I whisper hesitantly. The boy whips his head towards me, his eyes widen a bit, but then he hides his head back down into his legs, his dark curly hair the only thing visible, "Go away", he murmurs.

I sigh, and get close to him, I sit beside him, "Finny, it's okay to be upset", I start, waiting to see if he reacts, but he just sits there, sniffing away, his back moving with each sob.

I tentatively place a hand on his back and rub it, he doesn't flinch, so I continue the motion. "You know, Mike doesn't hate you" I try.

He laughs at my words, "Yeah right" he mumbles. "It's true, he's just hard on you, because he sees a lot of him in you....even though he won't admit it" I smile.

Finny gingerly raises his head and looks at me, even in the semi dark, I can see his bright blue eyes are swollen from crying and his face is red from pressing them up against his legs. He gives me a questioning look, but doesn't say anything, I chuckle a little.

"What?" he asks with a watery voice. I shake my head, "It's amazing as to how much you look like Mike, especially with that look" I say.

Finny scrunches his face even more, and I have to bite my lip from laughing further, *he could be his son*, I think to myself.

"It's not funny" he grumbles, turning away from me. I let out a huff, "Look, Finny, I know you don't know a lot about us yet, but Mike was just like you" I explain.

Finny still doesn't look at me so I continue, "When Mike and I first came on this ship, we were both awful with a sword, but me more so than him. So, one night he offered to practice one night with me", I explain, Finny slowly turning towards me.

"But, while we were practicing, the Captain heard us". Now Finny's full attention is on me, "What happened?" he asks.

"Well, the Captain was mad we disturbed his sleep, but he admired that we were practicing, so, we started practicing a couple times a week with the Captain", I explain, Finny's eyes go wide, "The Captain, taught you?!" Finny says, excitement bubbling.

I grin at him, "Yeah, he wanted to make sure we knew what we were doing, so he taught Mike and I. But, very quickly, the Captain favored me, and criticized Mike", I frowned.

"I caught on quick, under the Captain's guidance, but Mike started to get frustrated with the Captain, because he was more judgemental about him" I explained watching Finny.

"One night Mike got real upset with the Captain, and stormed off, what Mike didn't realize was that the Captain was being hard on him because of his potential".

Finny watched me speak, "So, I think Mike sees your potential, and doesn't want you to get beat down because, you are making progress" I said gently.

"But, why does he have to be so harsh, and Lonnie too" he mutters, voice a bit warbly. I rub his back again, "It's because Mike doesn't want to see you get beat down, when we were practicing I was yielding him almost every time, and it's frustrating, but giving up isn't how you get better. And Lonnie, he's excited because he's making

progress too, but no, how he talks to you isn't okay", I say.

Finny nods his head, "You know Mike is sorry right?" I ask. "Yeah, I know", he says. I rub his back once again, "Why don't you take some time, and come up when you're ready?"

Finny smiles at me, "That sounds good", I nod my head and give him one more pat, as I stand to leave.

I squeeze my way out of the folding, just as I'm almost through I hear, "Thanks El", I pause before saying, "You're welcome", to the small boy. I head back up to the top deck, where it is just about time for dinner.

Just as I'm sitting down with Will and Lucas who have already gotten their meal, I spot young Finny coming into the mess hall. He's looking around a bit, then his sight is set and he moves.

I watch his movements as he makes a beeline straight for Mike, who's talking with Jonathan off to the side. Finny approaches slowly then pokes at Mike who turns and looks at the small boy.

He holds up a finger to Jonathan, who nods and walks off. Mike bends down with his knees so that he is eye level with Finny. I stare in amazement as to how easily Mike talks with Finny, I see Finny's look turn from sadness, to happiness as his mouth turns into a smile as Mike talks to him.

I wish I could hear what they were saying. But, soon after, Mike raises his hand, in which Finny gives him a small high five. Mike stands and rubs his large hands into Finny's matching ebony hair.

I can see the small boy laugh, as he runs off to grab his meal. Mike is still smiling as he approaches our table.

I give him a look, "What was that about?" I ask him. He shakes his head, "Oh nothing" he shrugs off.

I push against his shoulder, "You won't tell me?" I give him my wide eyes that I know he can't resist.

Mike heaves out a breath, "You know I can't resist those eyes" he

whines, "Fine. He was saying how he was sorry for storming off like that and that he needs to be tougher", I nod my head, waiting for him to continue. "And I told him I was sorry for being so tough, but he said he's the one that needs to suck it up" Mike laughs.

"Anyways, we seem to be on good terms again" he says looking at me, "Thanks for talking to him". I smile widely at him, "Of course, that's what I'm here for right?" giving him a large wink, in which he pushes me with his shoulder.

We all pick at our meals as we chat about our days, it seems that all is right with the ship.

Oh how quickly I eat my words.

It seems that just when everything is looking up and going well, something just has to come in and wreck it within a short amount of time.

It's been over a couple weeks since the incident with Finny, and his attitude and demeanor change very quickly.

As he works with Mike and I, he is shown to be much more resourceful, and he is starting to stand up for himself more. For, when he and Lonnie are now sparring, even if Lonnie tries to put him down, Finny tends to show him up, but doesn't resort to the harsh name calling.

Mike has eased up on him as well, trying to throw in compliments here and there, instead of just criticisms. And he now does this with all of the young boys, and they are each growing in skill. We dismiss the boys, and off they go, and we start up shortly with the able bodied seaman.

But of course my luck and good spirit seem to haunt me, as I'm starting to figure things out in life, something crashes down on me hard.

We had just finished up working with the rest of the able bodied seaman, when I see Captain Hopper approach us. Even though he is

usually a bit grumbly and rarely shows his somewhat caring side, today, he seems even more so gruff, and I feel immediately intimidated.

I watch him carefully out of the corner of my eye and I notice that he is staring at me, but no, it's more like he's observing me, and I can't help but feel uncomfortable under his stare.

The men are putting away the swords and I approach Mike and whisper to him quickly, "Do you notice anything strange about Captain Hopper?" I ask.

Mike pretends that he is looking about, and I know he is trying to observe the Captain without being obvious, he looks back to the swords and mutters to me, "I don't know, but he keeps staring at you".

"That's what I mean, he's been eyeing me for quite some time now", I say nervously.

Mike shrugs his shoulders, "Maybe he's just trying to see how you're doing, training the men and all" he suggests.

I shake my head, "Then why isn't he watching you too?" Mike pauses, I can tell he's thinking, "I'm not sure El, maybe-" Mike tries but he's cut off when a bellowing voice booms across the deck, "Mr. Brenner!".

Both Mike and I jump a bit at his voice, as if he knew we knew we were talking about him. We turn slowly and hesitantly towards the Captain, I see that he is approaching us.

He stops when he reaches us, we look down as I mutter a quick, "Yes, Captain?" I hear him let out a long breath, "I need to see you in my cabin, now" he states plainly.

I risk a look up to him, our eyes meet, and I can tell that they are filled with a mixture of concern and confusion, and I wonder desperately what he wants from me.

My head turns towards Mike, who's giving me a questioning look as well. I look back to Captain Hopper, who has begun to move towards

his cabin, "Don't have all day, Brenner", he calls back behind his shoulder.

I feel my body tense a bit and start to go, when I feel Mike's hand grab onto my arm, I turn to look at him, "It'll be okay" he says, although I can tell he's a little worried too. I don't say anything but simply nod my head, as he slowly releases my arm from his grip, making my way towards the cabin.

As I approach the cabin, I shakily open the door and enter. What I see is the Captain leaning on the front of his desk, with his arms crossed. But what surprises me is that little Finny and Lonnie are standing in the office as well, their heads are down, and I can see deep frowns on their faces.

I start to worry, thinking they did something wrong, and maybe the Captain was going to have me punish them. My breathing picks up, thinking of what he would have me do to these sweet boys, a bunch of excuses and statements run through my mind, racing to think of what I could do to help the boys.

Before I can say anything though the Captain speaks, "So, Mr. Brenner, do you have any idea as to why I brought you in here today?" he asks.

I stare at his hard face, unreadable, I shake my head, but guess anyways, "Is it because of these boys?" I ask hesitantly.

I watch as Captain Hopper's mouth raises a bit on the side in a half smile, he huffs, "It's got something to do with them, but probably not what you're thinking", he says slowly.

I furrow my brows in confusion, honestly not sure where this conversation is going. Captain Hopper turns towards the boys, "Why don't you tell your friend here what you boys found" he says to them.

Finny is the first to raise his head, he looks scared, and a little lost as well. He looks at me with those big blue eyes, and I see confusion as well. What I hadn't noticed before is that young Finny was holding a bag, a seabag nonetheless, and I recognize it immediately, my eyes go wide in shock.

He raises the bag slowly and without a word he hands it over to Captain Hopper, who holds it firmly in his strong grasp, he's still looking at the boys, "Care to tell Brenner here how you came to find this?" he says.

The boys look at each other, when Finny takes a breath and starts, "W-We were, just climbing around through the ship. A-And were just exploring all the holes and secret places in the ship. When we stumbled upon this small room, and we...found this bag" he said, his eyes sad.

Captain Hopper nods his head, "And what did you find in this, bag?" he says holding up the said item in his hand.

Finny immediately turns to me, "We didn't see the name till after!" he cries to me, I'm standing in shock, knowing what they discovered. I carefully look over to the young boy, I can see his eyes are brimming with tears.

Now Lonnie is starting to shake a bit, I can see he's trying to not cry either. "W-We opened t-t-the bag, we thought it was a hidden t-t-treasure and a dress fell out" Finny cried.

I watched as the young boy was trying to explain, "We were shocked. And we didn't know what to do, s-s-so we brought it to the Captain, thinking he'd know what to do" Finny said.

Finny was now trying to catch his breath as he was trying to not cry any harder than he wanted to, he opened his mouth to speak, but he was only able to open and close it, and no words came out as he cried out and rubbed his fists into his eyes.

My heart broke for the young boys, knowing this was not their fault, "I found the name" Captain Hopper spoke, and I slowly looked at him.

"The boys brought me the bag, and, I have to admit I was surprised, but...I also wasn't, especially when I read whose name was on the bag", he stated.

I eyed the Captain carefully, taking in his every words. In my head, I'm mentally yelling at myself for even putting my name on that

damn bag, and even more so for not hiding it better. When Finny found that first hiding hole, that should have been my first cue to move it, but, I can't change that now.

But, then the Captain's words hit me, and I give him a quizzical look, so I ask my one question, "What do you mean, you weren't surprised?"

At this, the Captain breaks a bit and gives me a small smile, and chuckle, "Heh, kid" he sighs, looking straight into my face, "I've known for some time now" he says.

My eyes go wide in realization, he *knew*, my brain screams. I open my mouth, "H-How, w-wha-" I try, but I feel utterly lost.

The Captain chuckles at my loss for words, "I should say, I've had my suspicions, but this-" he holds up the bag, "Just confirmed it".

Our eyes meet, and I can see that his are filled with a bit of amusement, and I can't help but let out a half laugh myself at the situation.

Captain Hopper stands from his desk and moves towards the young boys, who have stopped their heavy sobbing, as they are sniffing now, they look up to the large man with big eyes. "You kids didn't do anything wrong, and nothing's going to happen to your pal here" he nods in my direction.

Finny speaks up, "Y-Y-You won't hurt El, will you?" he asks scared.

Captain Hopper lets out a barking laugh, "Ah kid, I'd never hurt El" he says as he rubs Finny's dark mop of curls. "But, you have to keep her secret", he says, now serious.

The boys look up to him, "So, it's true?" Lonnie speaks. Captain Hopper looks over to me, "Why don't you tell them kid".

I nod and take a breath and approach the boys, I pull them in, "Aye, it's true, I'm not a boy, but a girl" I confess, as my eyes fill with tears.

The boys look me over, a bit startled by the actual truth, "But that doesn't mean I'm not the same person, I'm as tough as any of these

men" I say giving them a wink as they flash me watery smiles.

"And, you need to keep this secret, even from Benjy and Murray", I explain and the boys nod their heads. Captain Hopper speaks from behind me, "Why don't you boys go, I need to speak to Ms. Brenner".

The boys give us one more look, and they silently and hesitantly exit from the cabin. Now, just Captain Hopper and I stand, taking in one another.

Captain Hopper lets out a long breath and shakes his head, I can tell he wants to say something, but I beat him to it, "How long?" I ask.

He looks at me quickly, "Awhile", he answers simply. I roll my eyes at his answer, "Well, how long is awhile?"

The Captain laughs again as he rubs his chin thoughtfully, "Probably the last year and a half" he says.

I feel the shock run through me, thinking of how long he has known, "But-" I try, but Captain Hopper raises a hand to stop me, "I found out the night I caught you and Wheeler there, a little too cozied up to each other", he chuckles as his eyes sparkle.

I feel my cheeks warm a bit at this information, "Even still, how did you guess I was a girl, Mike and I could have been-" I try again, but the Captain cuts me off, "Once I saw that, and observed you a little bit more, I knew you were a girl" he explained shortly.

I stare at him, dumbfounded, but he continues, "I started to notice your differences from the boys. How you were leaner, you didn't take your shirt off anymore, your face, much more feminine, but...I figured I'd wait and see what happened" he says nonchalantly.

I shake my head, "But, if you knew, why didn't you say anything, why haven't you thrown me off the ship!" I ask a bit haughty.

He stares at me with a firm look, "Because, what difference does it make?" he questions. My eyes furrow at his question and he continues, "I'd already known you for years, I knew what you could do, what you were capable of. So, how does making you a girl, make that any different?" he asks shrugging his shoulders.

I think on the question, but answer honestly, "It's because girls aren't supposed to travel on ship's, we're bad luck" I state a bit sadly.

Captain Hopper laughs at this, "You haven't been bad luck to us, maybe to yourself, but not to this ship you haven't" he chastises.

In that moment, I feel taken aback, unsure as to what Captain Hopper was actually telling me, but he answers my unsaid question, "Look, kid, I ain't going to throw you off this ship, you're too valuable for me to do that" he states firmly.

"You keep doing what you've been doing, and I'll watch your back, okay?" he questions as I look at him with wide eyes, my ears not believing what they are hearing.

"But, who else knows, other than those two boys, Wheeler and I?" he asks. "Uh, Will, Lucas and Dustin. That's it" I tell him as he nods his head.

"Keep it that way for awhile, I know there are sailors aboard who do think women are bad luck, and there are some who would go after you", he gives me a hard stare, "And...I don't want that happening to you", he says honestly.

I feel myself warm a bit at his words, feeling the sincerity behind them, I give him a small smile, "Thank you" I manage to whisper. He nods his head, "Just, take care of yourself, and make sure those boys do too" he affirms.

"Don't worry, they do" I smile at the Captain. "Okay, off you go then" he says with a wisp of his hand, I nod my head once again and turn to leave, but his voice catches me, "El", he says, I turn towards him, he tosses my bag into my hands, which I catch. "One more thing" he starts as I look at him.

"Make sure you and Wheeler there are *careful*" he words plainly, but I understand the meaning he is insinuating, "Don't need any little one's running around soon" he winks at me, and my face blushes, "No, Sir", I mumble, wanting to escape the embaressment, but something stops me.

I turn once again towards him and approach him quickly, I can see the confusion on his face, especially once I fling my arms around him and give him a quick tight hug.

"Thank you" I say, "You've been more like a father to me than my own" I state as I pull away and look into his eyes.

I can tell he's taken aback, but he pats my shoulders and then rubs my head affectionately, "Anytime kid, I, uh...care about you too" he smiles at me.

I break our hug and turn to leave, exiting the Captain's cabin, exhaling a long sigh of relief. As I feel a wave of anxiousness leave my body. The feeling of being discovered and thrown off the ship finally leaves the dark corner of my mind. I feel free.

No point of view

Back in the cabin, Captain Hopper watches El leave. The hug she gave him still lingering deep within his soul. He can feel the tears welling in his eyes.

The warm feeling of when she hugged him, he hadn't felt that since his daughter Sarah, was alive. He reaches down into his lapel and pulls out his golden locket. He opens the locket and stares down at his beautiful little girl.

He sighs, "Sarah, you've given me another chance, thank you" he cries as his silent tears fall down his cheek. "I promise, I'll make sure to keep her safe" he says clutching the locket to his chest. Knowing, that he will protect El, and even her friends from the danger that ensues.

FINALLY! Sorry it took so long! I just really wanted this chapter to be good! And as many of you guessed it, yes, Hopper had known for quite awhile, and now it's finally revealed!

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter! Please let me know what you think and PLEASE REVIEW! I love all of your feedback! You guys are all awesome being so patient and I very much appreciate it!

20. Midnight Oasis

WOW! Over 100 reviews on this story! You all are just so awesome and I love hearing your feedback and takes on the story, they always fill me with so much joy when I read them! Can't believe I've hit chapter 20! It's crazy!

Again, sorry for the long wait on posting this next chapter. Work has picked up, and I had class this week, plus I've been sick as well, which has sucked. But, I really wanted to get this chapter out for you guys, because I hate leaving you waiting!

Anyways, on with the next chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Blood Jack.

Mike's Point of View:

I can tell El is tense in this moment, and seems unsure as to what will fall next into this situation. I try to think it over, and I desperately try to make sure she feels calm, I open my mouth to speak, but I am cut short by Captain Hopper shouting, "Mr. Brenner!" from across the deck.

El and I both jump at his booming voice. We turn slowly to meet the Captain's gaze as he approaches us.

He stops when he reaches us, we look down on command as I hear El mutter a quick, "Yes, Captain?" Captain Hopper lets out a long breath "I need to see you in my cabin, now" he states plainly.

I keep my head down, but can see out of the corner of my eye that El has turned her head up to look up the Captain, fear and concern is written on her face, my heart drops a bit.

I watch as her head turns towards me, and I give her a questioning look as well. She looks back to the Captain, who has begun to move towards his cabin as he shouts "Don't have all day, Brenner", over his back.

I watch him go, but my attention soon turns back towards El, I can

tell she's shaking a bit from fear. She starts to move, but I grab her arm quickly with my hand, needing her to know, that I'll be right here. "It'll be okay" I whisper, giving her an honest look.

She looks at me with those deep brown eyes, she doesn't speak, but nods her head instead. I slowly let her arm go, as she makes her way towards the cabin. My heart beat against my chest is the only thing I can hear, as I watch my beloved make her way across the deck.

I don't take my eyes off of her as she approaches the Captain's cabin. She hesitantly opens the large wooden door, and she disappears inside.

Not wasting any time, but wanting to draw attention to myself, I move hastily across the deck, avoiding seamen alike, trying to get to the deck above the Captain's cabin.

I turn my head left and right trying to assess how many people are around me, and I find there is only Jonathan and another seamen, who are distracted by a map they are turning over together by the wheel of the ship.

Since we were children, we noticed a small golden horn coming from the Captain's cabin. We found out later that this horn was used to talk to the Captain while he was in his study so that he would be able to give directions without leaving his cabin.

We also discovered that the Captain sometimes forgot to cork his end of the horn, so that no one could hear his end of what may be going on in the cabin. Not that you could hear well, but it was enough to get the gist of what may be going on.

I pretend to be leaning over the rail next to the golden horn, and I listen intently, hoping this was the one time he forgot to plug his horn.

I close my eyes, straining my ears when, *yes!* I begin to hear the Captain's low voice, and El's voice travel up through the horn.

It's muffled and hard to make out, but I force myself to listen. "Care to -enner-find this?" I can barely hear the Captain's voice. I don't hear

anything for a bit. My mind racing, thinking who else the Captain has in his cabin.

When finally I hear a young voice, that sounds like it's crying, "W-We were, just climbing -ough the ship. A-And - -exploring all the holes - places in the ship. -stumbled upon this small room, and we...found-bag" the small voice said. My eyes go wide realizing it's one of our ships boys.

My head turns over the broken words in my head. Exploring, places in the ship, found a bag? My head puzzles a bit, still not sure what they were talking about, when I hear the Captain's voice once again.

"And what - find in this, bag?" I can hear him ask the boy, I'm straining myself to listen closely.

Suddenly an outburst from one of the boys, which makes him easy to hear when he says, "We didn't see the name till after!" My brain is still trying to figure out what bag they are talking about. The young boys voice still carries through the horn easily.

"W-We opened t-t-the bag, we thought it was a hidden t-t-treasure and a dress fell out", suddenly, after these words, I swear I could hear my heart stop. I feel my breathing catch in my chest. They found her seabag, the one she wore to Kingston, the one with her dress! My brain finally catches on, but I hear the voices speak out again.

"We were shocked. -didn't know what to do, -brought it to the Captain, t-know what to do". *Yeah get her thrown off the ship!* I hear my inner voice scream to the young child.

I can hear a lot of crying and sniffing coming from the horn. I finally realize that there's more than one ship's boys in there as the crying is different and not in sync. I place a hand on my head and run my impatient fingers through my hair.

"I found the name", I look back towards the tube as I hear the Captain speak these words. I continue to listen, desperately wanting to know what was going to happen next.

"The boys brought me the bag, and - surprised, but - wasn't,

especially when I read whose name - bag", I hear the Captain a bit more garbled this time. So, he was surprised, but wasn't? My thoughts turn over again. I listen to the silence of the horn.

Finally, I hear El's sweet voice, she must be close to the horn, because I can hear her perfectly, "What do you mean, you weren't surprised?"

The Captain must have gotten closer to her because I hear him say "I've known for some time now", and my eyes go wide.

I hear El stutter a bit, but then the Captain steps in "I should say, I've had my suspicions, but this, just confirmed it", my head is trying to put together everything it's heard. *The Captain knew?* But...my mind wanders for a bit, enough so that I miss the next couple of interactions.

I pick up the next words of "And, you need to keep this secret, even from Benjy and Murray", Captain Hopper speaks followed by, "Why don't you boys go, I need to speak to Ms. Brenner".

My heart hammers against my chest, only thinking of what the Captain has to say to El, but my legs move faster, as I rush down the stairs from the upper deck, and race towards the cabin. I watch as a red faced Finny and Lonnie exit the cabin. I grab them quickly by their necklines, and pull them to the side, into a dark corner.

They seem surprised by the sudden movement, and frankly, I am surprised by my movements as well. They look at me with shocked faces. "Mike?" Finny asks looking at me with his vivid blue eyes.

I give them a harsh look, "What happened" is all I say. The boys look between each other, and shake their heads.

"N-N-Nothing" Lonnie tries, but I place my hands firmly on their shoulders, I give them a wild look, knowing I'm not kidding, "I need to know what happened" I say through gritted teeth.

The boys are looking wide eyed at me, never seeing me so intense before. They aren't speaking, but tears of fear begin to streak down their cheeks. Finally, I sigh, remembering El's words of needing to be more gentle.

I let go of them, and I can see them relax a bit, I let out a long breath, "Look, I didn't mean to scare you, but El's my mate, I need to know what happened in there, with the bag", I whisper the last part.

I see Finny give me a curious look, "How'd you know about the bag?". At this I give him a small smile, "Because I heard through the horn", I say.

They are still looking at me inquisitive, but they don't budge. Finally I say, "The dress", and they look down, not wanting to answer.

"Did you find out?" I ask, and at this they whip their heads to me, "You knew, didn't you?" Lonnie asks with a scowl.

I nod my head, "Yes, I've known for awhile, same with the rest of our group", I whisper.

The boys seem at a loss for words when Finny finally speaks, "But....how did you know?" his eyes moving rapidly trying to find ground on my face.

I let out another sigh, "She told me, and we're...kind of...together" I say, as I can feel my face get red.

The boys actually let out a laugh at this, "Wait, you and El?" Lonnie chuckles. I move my head up and down, "Yes, El and I" I state.

"So that's why you two are so weird around each other", Finny states as if everything is coming together in his small head, but I give him a questioning look, "What do you mean?" I ask the small boy.

He's wearing a large knowing grin now, "You two like...dance around each other" he starts, "And you are *always* looking at each other, with those big eyes too!" Lonnie finishes.

I'm glad we are in a dark corner so the boys can't see my seemingly red face, I look down and shake my head, "You two are too smart for your own good" I say mildly.

They are still grinning at me, but I pull my mouth into a straight line, "I still need to know what the Captain thought" he asks the boys.

Finny shrugs, "He didn't seem mad, he said he knew" he states. "Yeah, I don't think El's in trouble" Lonnie says seriously.

I nod my head in approval, I stand and the boys eyes follow me as I tower over them, I rub their heads affectionately, "Run along you two, and thanks".

They look up at me with their curious eyes, nod their heads and turn to leave, Finny turns to me before he leaves and says, "Don't worry, we won't tell anyone" he tells me earnestly. And I give him a heartfelt smile, knowing he would be true to his word, as they run off.

I wait off to the side patiently, waiting for El to, hopefully, leave the cabin. It doesn't take long after, when I see the cabin door open, and my beautiful El steps out. I slink around the corner, let her get ahead, and then I'm by her side. She whips her head to me, but I stare straight off.

She ushers me down to our sleeping quarters. We both check around, making sure no one is around, and we fling each other into the others arms. We hold on tightly, as I softly kiss her head.

I can feel her warm tears against my chest, so I pull her back, and bring a hand up to wipe away her tears. We stare earnestly at each other, but she gives me a warm smile, and my heart picks up.

"Are you ok?" I ask a bit lamely. She chuckles but nods her head, "Yeah" she starts, sniffing a bit. "It's going to be ok" she says smiling.

A wave of relief washes over me as I pull her against my chest once again, relasing her movements as she cuddles closer.

"I was scared" I admit, and she pulls away, looking at me with her brown eyes, "I was too" she breaths.

I tuck a strand hair behind her ear, and she smiles at the gesture, "He's not going to tell anyone, and he's not putting me off" El says looking at me.

I let out a long breath I didn't know I was holding in, "I'm glad to hear that, it seems he values you" I tell her honestly.

She gives a half smile, "He said that I've proven myself, and that it doesn't matter if I'm a boy or not" she states.

I continue to listen, "He still wants me apart of this ship" she smiles widely, in which I return one to her as well. "Who wouldn't want you apart of a ship?" I joke, she lets out a little chuckle, as we hold onto one another.

Our eyes meet again, searching each other, and I do the only thing my heart is telling me to do, so I pull her lips to mine. We start off slow, but soon our worry and fear pool out from our hearts, as our lips move quicker against one another.

I pull her closer against me, as if she was going to disappear. Our mouths move, our tongues tangle together in a longing dance. And finally we pull away breathless, and El gives me a bashful look and turns away.

I smile as I chuckle, "What is it?" I ask. She shakes her head, "The Captain told me we need to keep it together, that he doesn't want any little one's running around just yet", she winks at me, as she looks down between us and then back up to me, a mischievous look on her face.

I feel my face blush, as I know what she is getting at, but I pull her closer still, and I whisper hotly into her ear, "Some day...and someday soon, I don't know if I'll be able to keep that promise" I kiss the side of her head and trail multiple kisses down her neck, she lets out a soft moan as she pulls into me.

I laugh, and she hits my chest, "You are such a tease Mike" she whispers against my neck. "And so are you, my darling El", I say back to her as we hold onto each other a little longer.

El's Point of View

I'm grateful as the days continue to pass by without incident. However, the problem I had with Dustin and Lucas finding out about my secret, with them looking at me all funny, is ten times worse with Finny and Lonnie, I've found.

These two are much more watchful of me now and I swat at them for staring. Curse their little thirteen year old minds, thinking back to what my boys used to talk about at their age. I'm sure these two have been exchanging some more colorful notions now that they know a woman stands close to them.

But, oh well, I put it out of my mind as I focus on my duties and what else plays at hand. The boys have continued to power through their training and they are making remarkable progress as the months pass. And just as we did at their age, they grew like weeds.

Even little Finny is starting to sprout up a bit, and as he does, he's starting to look even more like Mike, in which I secretly fawn over.

Everyone on board in all of our groups that we teach have all made exceptional progress. The looming threat of the monsters have begun to seem a bit less scary, as we prepare ourselves more and more each day. It's still warm as we approach the coast of Florida, where we plan to rendezvous with the rest of the fleet that is planning on taking on the monster's nest.

Although I feel somewhat prepared for the fight, I can't help but look at the our young ship's boys and feel worried about them. They seem so small, so defenseless, and I'm scared that they're going to get hurt, and I couldn't bare the thought of what would happen to these boys.

I desperately try to push those thoughts out of my mind and focus on the task at hand. Because we are to be making port in Florida, which will be our last port before we head into the bermuda triangle, and I've been putting some ideas aside for Mike and I. For, once again I want us to have a day to ourselves, undisturbed.

Because as I think about the young boys getting hurt, I also think of my boys as well, Mike especially. Anytime we are together we are able to share a short hug or cuddle, and in the rare occurrence a time in which our lips are joined together and our hands are roaming.

Mike has managed to talk me out of a few articles of clothing, but nothing much, just enough to soothe his now adult mind. For, I know he won't be able to hold out much longer, and he's done pretty good so far, but...my brain thinks to the upcoming fight and what might

happen, and I don't want to be thinking about what *may* happen. But, I also don't want to think about what could have been, what experiences we should have shared, and something happens.

I sigh, these confusing thoughts haunting my brain and giving me headaches. The worry about not showing my love for Mike, but also the consequences that could follow. My mind is heavy, but heart beats for my love. I just hope they are able to come together in a moment of truths.

We have finally made port in Florida, and we are one of the first of the King's fleet to land in another tropical paradise. Although, I notice very quickly that Florida is unlike the other tropical ports we have visited, for, there are a lot more buildings and people and not as many street vendors. However, the warm tropical air and exotic fruit that spans about, draws me and the other boys in.

Our young ships boys are excited too, I watch them feeling their excitement pour off of them. I consider them luckier than us, for we had to spend over a year on the *Hawk* before we made our first landfall. Where these boys get that after half a year.

But, whatever, I'm just anxious to get on land and do some exploring by myself. I've pulled Mike to the side and have whispered to him that I will meet up with him later in the day. He frowns deeply at this as he grasps my hand.

"But, El, I thought we could do like we did last time" he pouts. I give him my sparkling eyes and whisper into his ear, "You'll have to be patient, I have something planned", and as I pull away, I see his eyes widen, and he nods at my directions.

We aren't able to get off the ship as quickly as we had in the past, but I don't mind this because it gives me a chance to really decide as to what I want to do.

Soon, it is our turn to disembark, and we hit the land with a satisfied groan. Although we love the sea, feeling solid ground feels good after a long time.

Our young ships boys scurry past us, yelling in excitement as they take in the new sites around them.

Mike pulls me off to the side, "Where and when do you want to meet?" he asks me. I look about and notice a tall statue of a man with numerous flags flapping about on many wooden poles, and I point in that direction, "There. Meet me at the statue at four past, ok?" I give him a wide grin.

He gives me a once over as he looks over to the statue, but he smiles all the same, "It can't come soon enough" he whispers, as he gives me a swift kiss on the cheek.

I smile at his gesture as he slowly releases my hand and heads over to where Lucas, Dustin and Will stand. They all wave to me, and I wave back, as I make my way into the busy streets of Florida.

I find an hidden alleyway, where I quickly change into the dress of which I wore the last time Mike and I had our little excursion. But, in all honesty, I just want a moment to be a girl, to feel like I am actually a lady in society. Thankfully I keep my hair back at all times. So, now when I let it down it curls this way and that and it lands at my mid back.

I'm a bit surprised, for I only let my hair down to wash it quickly, and never take a true moment to marvel at it. And I grin with glee, thinking as to how much Mike will enjoy this.

My first stop is at a small shop in which I noticed had clothes hanging in the windows, I approach it and head inside. The air is cooler inside, I take in the sites around me, when a tall, skinny woman approaches me, "Hello dearie, my aren't you a little looker!" she coos.

I feel my face warm up at her remarks, only receiving compliments from Mike, but it feeling good coming from this beautiful lady. "Thank you" I let out shyly and lower my head.

"Now, now, dearie, no need to be shy! What can I help you with today?" she asks. I look around, not knowing where to start, but I whisper, "I'm looking for a dress" I whisper.

She nods her head wildly, and waves her arms about, "Oh, of course my dear! We've got plenty of those!" she exclaims as she grabs onto my hand and pulls me towards the back of the store.

I stumble about as she pulls on me, attempting to stay on my feet at her excitement. When we reach the back of the store, my mouth goes wide at the variety of dresses. "These, are our lovely dresses!" the woman gestures to the material about her.

No words leave my mouth as I marvel at the colors and shiny material that is about me. The woman must notice my hesitation, "Would you like some help dearie?" she asks kindly.

I only look at her and nod my head. She lets out a tiny laugh, "Oh, my dear, what should we try first?" she places her hand under her chin, her eyes scanning her collection.

"Ah!" she says suddenly, that I jump a bit at her exclamation. I watch as the woman goes forward and grabs onto a deep purple dress, that has a low neckline. "Let's try this!" she says as she pushes it into my hands and shoves me behind a curtain.

I assume I'm supposed to try it on, so, I pull my dress up and over my head, and pull the deep purple dress on.

I step out behind the curtain, and the woman is looking me over, "Pretty, but no, not that one", she states quickly, I frown a bit at her harshness. I look down at the dress and run my hands over it, "I think it's pretty", I say quietly.

The woman laughs again, "It's pretty my dear, but it's not *you*" she draws out. She searches between her mess of dresses before she turns to me, "May I ask what this dress is for?"

I flush under her question, and turn my head down, "Uhm...it's uh...for...someone, special" I finally spit out, looking at the woman.

I watch her eyes sparkle at my words, "Oh my dear, a boy?", she croons. "Oh, then we, must, find something special. May I ask what the occasion is?"

My face gets even redder at her question, I honestly wish she would

stop asking so much, I look up, but only gap at her.

I see her smile turn into a giant grin that fits her whole, small head, and a mischievous look comes across her face, "Oh, my dear, is it *that*, kind of 'special occasion'?" she quotes with her fingers.

"I...uh" try to speak, but I'm so embarrassed I can't get any words out. The woman notices this and comes closer to me, she places a hand on my shoulder, I look into her deep green eyes, "My dear, you have nothing to be worried about, I'm just teasing a bit, but, obviously this boy means something to you if you're going all out for him".

This time I feel myself nodding, "Yes, he's the most wonderful guy I've ever met, and he makes me feel so special that...well" I fall short.

"Want to make him feel special as well?" she guesses. My cheeks are flaming now, but I nod at her words. And she claps her hands together, "Well, then let us find the most perfect dress, for this most special occasion!" she cheers.

We spend the next several minutes of me trying on a number of dresses, in which come close, but does not fully fulfill what the dress woman is looking for. After the sixth dress, I'm about done, and I open my mouth to say something, when the woman pulls out a dress from behind a rack.

I watch as she holds it up in front of me, my eyes widen as I take it in. It's a soft blue, and it's lightly decorated in pink flowers. "This, try this one" the woman says as she hands me the dress.

I step back behind the curtain and change into the dress, and it fits me perfectly. I step out from the curtain and the woman clasps her hands together, "Oh, my! This, is the dress!" she exclaims as she takes my hand and twirls me about. I marvel as the dress swirls about me, I laugh into the spin.

The dress has a sweeping neckline, that shows modesty, but it also accentuates my body as well. I know Mike will drop dead once he sees me in this.

"I'll take it!" I say excitedly, as the woman and I move up front to

where her cash box is. "That'll be on shilling" she says holding out her hand. I open my seabag and deposit the money into her hands.

"Thank you for doing business at madam Char's dress shop!" she says with a wide smile. I look up at her, "I can't thank you for all your help, my guy will love this dress", I spin once again.

"My dear, he won't be able to keep his hands off of you!" she chortles, and my face turns red once again.

I thank her again and turn to leave, when I think of one more thing, "Madam Char?" I ask. The woman turns towards me again, "Yes, m'dear?".

I stand twirling a part of my new dress in my hands, "Do you know of somewhere, quiet and...private like?"

WARNING: SOME MILD SMUT IN THIS PART! I know I can't stop people from reading it, but just putting it out there if underage.

It's getting close to the time I'm supposed to meet Mike at the fountain, and my heart is pounding in my chest.

After madam Char had explained to me a perfect spot for out "special occasion", I hurriedly left the shop and made a couple more stops along the way. Now, I hold a basket, filled with an assortment of food, and a large, quilted blanket as well. I'm rushing as I see the fountain in sight. There's no one close by, I notice.

As I approach though, I notice that Mike isn't there yet, so I slowly approach the statue and gaze up for it a bit, the wind picks up, and I feel my dress ruffle in the breeze.

That's when I hear a gasp behind me, I turn at the sound and find Mike gaping at me. I take him in as he looks at me, he holds one arm behind his back. He approaches me softly.

As he gets closer, I see his mouth gaping, and when we finally meet he speaks, "Y-You look beautiful", he says in awe.

I look down and feel my cheeks burn at his words, no matter how

many times he says it, I feel all fluttery inside.

He looks down to my hands, "What's that for?" he asks. I give him a wide grin, "You'll see".

Mike smirks at me, "Oh, I forgot, these are for you", and he pulls his arm from around his back, and I'm about knocked over from the sight. He holds up a beautiful bouquet of simple flowers, a rainbow of colors I've never seen before.

I feel my eyes welling up with tears, "Oh, Mike" I say breathless, "They're beautiful" I exclaim. He shakes his head, "Yeah, but not like you" he gives me a warm look.

He hands me the flowers and gently takes the basket from my arm, I hesitate at first but Mike gives me a look, "I won't look, but it looks heavy, I'll carry this, and you take the flowers" he winks.

My heart melts right then and there at his chivalry, but the sun is starting to set, so I loop my arm through his. He gives me a questioning look, "On our way, Mr. Wheeler" I coo. Mike doesn't hesitate as he lets me lead the way.

After a short hike following madam Char's directions, we twist our way through the tropical woods. It's a fairly easy trek, and as madam Char said, "No one will be there, it's a spot not very many know about".

I hope so, my brain says. We walk talking quietly to one another, when finally I see the split palm tree madam Char had talked about, I take a hard left and drag Mike along.

Finally, a few more minutes and I see the beautiful little oasis madam Char described. Both Mike and my eyes go wide, "Wow" we both say, taking in the beauty around us.

There, in the middle of the forest lay a brilliant blue oasis, that's small, and would barely fit ten people in it. But it's surrounded by large rocks and trees, hiding away its secret. There's a small sandy 'beach' resting nearby the water. And a small waterfall protrudes from a rock, that looks like you could hide behind.

"How did you find this?" Mike asks in bewilderment looking at me, I shrug my shoulders and give him a smirk, "Oh, a girl has her ways" I wink at him.

He just smiles widely and follows me to the sand. He sets down the basket and I pull out the blanket, which Mike helps me set onto the sand. It's a fairly large blanket and has more than enough room for both of us.

I sit down gently, and pat the spot next to me, Mike doesn't need to be told twice as he sits and snuggles into my side.

"This is perfect" he marvels as we look at one another. I grab the nearby basket, and show him inside, he gasps as he gazes at the food inside.

"Wow, El, you didn't have to do all of this" he frowns a bit. But I shake my head, "I wanted it to be special". He gives me a small smile and plants a gentle kiss on my cheek as he whispers, "How did I get so lucky?".

We dig into the meat and cheese and the delicious fruit I had purchased at the market. We wash it down with the bottle of wine I had procured as well.

Once we are full, we lay on the blanket, staring up to the now dark sky that is illuminated by the full moon.

Mike nuzzles his head into mine, and I nuzzle him back. He turns so that he is sitting on his side and he wraps an arm around my waist. "I can't get over how amazing you are" he says.

"I could say the same about you" I say back. We are looking into each others eyes, and Mike makes the first move as he swoops down and captures my lips with his.

It starts off slow, like usual, but soon, our pace quickens. Our lips moving in synchronicity against one another, two puzzle pieces that fit together perfectly each time. I feel Mike move his hands up and down my side, as he breaks away and starts to trail kisses down my neckline. I moan in satisfaction, in which he grips against me hard.

Since my dress is loose, it gives him easy access, to my collarbone, in which he begins to attack, and I moan against him, "Mike" I whisper as I bring my hands up into his thick hair.

I grasp it between my hands as he groans as well, "El, I love it when you do that" he pants, as he brings his lips back to mine.

He's on top of me now, and I slip my hands into his loose white shirt and feel his bare chest against my hands, I can feel the heat radiating from him.

Now his hands are moving lower as he grasps at my butt and squeezes hard. "El, you're so hard to resist" he pants. I push him off slowly, and he gives me a curious look, but I only smile, as I begin to stand, and pull him with me.

We stand close to one another, but I reach out and pull at his shirt and lift it above his head. "Your turn" I tease as I motion for my dress, he hesitates, but soon his hands travel ever so slowly down to the bottom of my dress and he gently lifts it above my head.

And then, I stand bare to the world, Mike gently places my dress on the blanket, but not without taking his eyes off of me. We've never seen each other naked below our waists, so, it's a new experience. I feel a bit embarrassed but Mike quickly pulls me towards him and our bare chests press against one another.

We let out soft sighs against one another, "Stunning" is the only word he breathes, as he pulls back. I give him a mischievous look as I move towards the water, he gives me a curious look, but watches me move, "Come on Mike, your turn" I say gesturing to his pants, as I dive into the water.

I come back to the surface, not having to tread water since it's fairly shallow, but it comes up past my chest. I look at towards the shore where Mike stands, "Come on!" I shout and I see him smile widely.

I observe intently as he removes his pants, and he approaches the water. He slowly enters instead of jumping in like I did, but I don't mind, it gives me a moment to observe, the moonlight not hiding anything.

Soon, he is near me and he wraps his arms around me quickly, spinning us in the water. I shriek in delight, wrapping my arms around his neck, and my legs against his bare waist.

We place our foreheads against each other and breathe in one another. "You don't look too bad yourself" I tease him. I can see the light blush against his cheek. And then it's my turn as I bring our lips together.

Wet from the water adds a whole new feeling to our kiss, and our bare bodies seem to add more gusto to Mike's confidence.

We move about in the water, as I move my hands anywhere I have yet to feel, marveling at the new sensations.

Mike pulls us towards a large rock and he places my back against it carefully, I drop my legs from his waist, and he presses into me. I can feel his wholeness against mine, and we shudder and the feeling.

Mike breathes into my ear, "You feel amazing" his breath hot and heavy, as I place both my hands on each side of his head, I pull him into a steaming kiss. Our mouths are warm from our passion as we move against one another. Feeling each other in this new way.

Mike moves his hands to my butt and pulls me against my waist, I gasp at his forwardness, but my foggy mind and his warm kisses prevail me to move forward.

Soon, Mike moves us once again and pulls us under the waterfall, I scream in delight, as I wrap my arms and legs around him again. Once we are behind the waterfall in the small cavern, we are truly alone.

Mike sets me back down, and we stand in each other's arms, just staring at one another. "This is the best night of my life, it can't get any better" Mike states as he places a kiss on my head.

Now my heart starts to beat rapidly against my chest, making my decision, I jump so that I am wrapped tightly around Mike's waist, and I breathe heavily into him, pressing my breasts into his chest.

"I know one thing we could do...to make it perfect" I say and plant a steaming kiss on his mouth, as we tangle our tongues together and

moan against one another.

Mike holds onto me tightly, and I can feel him rubbing against me, I pull away, and our eyes flitter between each others. "Mike, tonight, I'm ready" I tell him boldly.

Mike pulls back a bit, giving me a quizzical look, "What do you mean?" he shakes his head. I honestly want to smack him for being so stupid, but I press on, "I mean...I'm ready, let's make love" I say careening his face.

His eyes go wide at my statement, and he seems speechless, which surprises me. "El, what...?" he starts, but I pull him against me.

"Mike, I love you so much, and...I know we are going to be fighting soon....and I don't want us thinking we didn't do this because we were afraid and-" I start, but I'm cut off by Mike's mouth against mine.

It's gentle and sweet, and Mike holds onto me just the same. In that moment, I can feel his tenderness and love in my every being. He pulls away slowly and gives me that smile I fell in love with.

He places a hand under my chin and looks into my eyes, "El, I love you, so much!" he exclaims. "But, you don't have to do this just because I've made comments-" he tries but then I cut him off as well. "No, it's not that, I mean...I want it too" I give him a fleeting glance.

Mike looks into my eyes and caresses my face with his thumb, "El, this is all I could ever ask for. Yes, of course I would take you right now" he says earnest in which I chuckle at, "But, I couldn't imagine how awful I would feel, if you got pregnant" he says.

I shake my head, "It doesn't matter, and besides Ms. Roundtree said just because we have sex doesn't mean I'll get pregnant" I explain to him.

"But, I couldn't live with myself, if something happened to you, or, to our child, when we go into battle" he explained pulling me close and placing our foreheads together.

"El, like I said, if we were still just traveling the sea, I would have you

every which way right now" he laughs and I smile up at him. "It's too risky though, no matter how much I want you" he stares deep into my eyes.

I frown a bit, "Yes, but what if something happens, to either of us" I start and Mike continues to look at me, "I mean, what if you die, then I'll never have had that experience with you, and I wouldn't have the chance to even try to have a child with you" my eyes fill with tears.

"I know, it scares me too, but that's why I want to wait" he explains as he wipes the tears from my cheeks. "I want to marry you El, then, we will have that moment together, and we won't have anything to fear" he hugs me close.

"If we wait, then we have it to look forward to, it'll be our success for after" he smiles at me. I nod in understanding, "Okay" I whisper and bring him back down into another long and sweet kiss.

We stay in water awhile longer, caressing and feeling one another until the coolness makes us shiver.

We retire to our blanket, which we wrap around one another. Although we do not become one this night. We discover new things and feelings from the others bodies. Each of us marveling at the sensations we can make the other feel.

Soon we are panting from our activities, and we cuddle up to one another, our bare bodies fitting together perfectly. I lay on top of Mike's chest, as I play with his hair and he strokes my back lovingly.

"We will come back here" I feel Mike say. I look down at him, "What do you mean?"

He chuckles, and I feel it reverberate against his chest, "We will spend our wedding night, right here" he raises his arm and gestures to the area around us.

I place my head against his chest and laugh too, "It would be perfect" I sigh, laying against his chest, my exhaustion finally taking over.

"No, I'm serious, this will be the spot" he states firmly. I nod my head against him, "Okay then, we will get married, and then make love

right here" I smile into him, as he wraps both of his arms around me and squeezes me tight.

"Right here" he parrots as I feel his tiredness take over. And soon we drift off, in each others arms, by our small little oasis in the light of the full moon.

Oh wow, didn't think I'd make it through that one! I did originally write where they did follow through, but my gut was telling me to wait. This moment has been in my brain for quite awhile and wanted to make it happen. I have some ideas and I'm trying to make them all work into a fluid story, and I hope it works.

Thanks again for sticking out another long wait! Again, I was busy and sick, but I'm happy I got this one out finally!

Thank you again for the wonderful reviews, I love hearing them! So, as always please review and let me know what you thought about this chapter!

21. Red

You are all so amazing! I love your reviews! Can't believe that I hit chapter 20 last time as well! Ok, I've been playing with an idea in my mind and I think I've finally figured out how I will incorporate it, and I think you will all really like it!

Ok, onto the next chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things* or *Bloody Jack*.

Mike's Point of View:

The bright tropical sun rises to early for my liking. I can feel the intense rays raining down on my eyelids, and I squint as I slowly open my eyes.

Thankfully, there is some much appreciated shade from the palm trees above, I reach my right hand up and run it through my thick black hair, and let out a long yawn.

Suddenly, I feel a rustling from my side, and I look down, and I beam so wide at the sight. My eyes train on the radiant being beside me, whose bare body is curled up tightly up against mine.

While she slumbers, I take in her form. I take my hand and run it gently down her side. *She's like an angel*, I say to myself, as I admire her smooth skin against my calloused hands.

She shivers at my touch, and I stop my movements and rest my hand on her shoulder. I continue to stare at her beauty. The blanket had been pulled away from our chests throughout the night, and though she has her arms tucked up around her chest, I can't help but feel the blush spread across my face.

The moments we were able to share the night before were unforgettable. The way El looked at me, with those deep brown eyes that were filled with love and passion. And the way we were able to have our intimate moment together, it sent shivers down my spine.

My memory flashes back to the moment El fully exposed herself to

me. I couldn't help but shamelessly eye her hungrily. And the feeling of the fullness of our bare bodies melded together, unforgettable.

My annoying male brain shouted at me though as I denied her. My hormones were smacking me from the inside out for denying us that moment. But, the rational side won out, knowing deep down that no matter how perfect this moment was, that I had to marry her first, that this threat needed to be ended. I would never be able to live with myself if she became pregnant with our child and I perished and never married her. Or worse, if she became pregnant and I lost both her and our unborn child.

I shiver at the thought. I could never imagine losing the woman I loved with all my heart, especially to those beasts. And that's why I knew if we waited, that we would both come out unscathed. And then, we could be together.

I'm pulled from my thoughts as I feel El stir once more at my side, this time she brings her hands up over her head, exposing her full self to me, I can't help but admire her body and eagerly watch. I feel my blood rush and head to a certain area.

Her eyes flutter and squint at the harsh sun as mine did. She turns and looks at me with a radiant smile. She holds herself up on her side with one arm supporting her head, the other draping against her soft stomach, she's not trying to hide anything.

I can feel my eyes widen as she chuckles at me, "Like what you see?" she teases. I give a small laugh in return as I reach over and pull her close to me, "Obviously" I say lazily, as I rub my head into hers, nuzzling her face.

"Mmm...I can tell", she giggles as she reaches her hand down to my waist and grabs at my tell tale arousal. I groan into her ear as she teases me, "El" I growl.

And she's laughing at me as I roll us over so I'm laying flush against her, but I use my arms to hold some of the weight off her.

I look down at her gorgeous face and can't help the grin that spreads wide across it. I caress her cheek gently with my hand. She closes her

eyes at the contact, but looks up to me again with a bashful look.

I nuzzle our noses together and she laughs at the contact, "You, are so enamouring" I whisper to her. She laughs again as she places both of her hands on my face, "My such a big word" she teases.

I scoff at her and begin to pepper her face with kisses, she giggles throughout the ordeal, "Mike!" she chuckles.

But, finally I land a kiss directly on her mouth and we slide into our familiar motions of our kiss. I feel her hands caress my bare back sweetly, as she teases her nimble fingers as I press against her.

I break our kiss, and see her eyes dilated, and I'm sure mine are the same. El shakes her head at me, as she continues to caress up and down my sides, she gives me a sweet look, "When did you turn into the good one?" she questions.

I bring my head down to her and give her a quick kiss, "Because, it will be worth the wait, and I want to love you without the notion of either of us dying".

She nods her head, but frowns, "Hopefully this mess is dealt with quickly", she says, our eyes meeting, "I want to marry you the second the fight is over".

I nod my head as well, "That, will definitely be arranged" I agree as I meet her once again, our lips burning against one another.

We stay like that for most of the morning, taking in the intimate moment while we can, unsure as to when our next encounter like this will be. My male brain is beating me up on the inside, knowing that I'm stupid for not taking her, but my heart knowing it made the right decision.

For now, we revel in our moment together. Bare to the world, but only to each other. As we love each other in this way for now. Knowing that someday soon, our true love will be able to be shown.

El's Point of View

The morning drags on as we continue our moment together. But, we know we should be getting back soon. Our friends only being able to cover for us for so long. From what the Captain told us we will be docked for a couple of days as we await for the rest of the fleet to arrive. Then, we will embark on this fight we do not want to happen.

Mike and I finally arise and dress, however, slowly as we each interrupt the other while getting dressed. Before either of us can get into any article of clothing, Mike pulls me once again into him, as he wraps his arms around me, and sets his forehead against mine.

"Mmm, I don't want this to end" he nuzzles into me, which I return, "I know, I wish we could stay like this forever" I pout.

I bring my head up and meet Mike's mouth with mine, as I throw my arms around his neck and pull him into another long kiss. He breaks away laughing, "We've got to stop, or we might just miss our ship" he jokes.

I chuckle too, "Well, that wouldn't be too bad if it wouldn't be written in the log that we abandoned ship. Besides, I'm sure the boys wouldn't leave us anyways, and I don't want them to find us like this" I step back and gesture to our bare state.

I watch as Mike hungrily observes me, "Your tattoo" he says, moving to me and placing a gentle hand upon it. "I love that we share the same one, but for some reason it looks amazing on you in this state" he raises his brows.

I smack his chest for his cheekiness as I bend down to grab my seabag, ready to get dressed in my sailor gear, but Mike approaches me and takes my bag. I give him a curious look as I observe him reaching in and grabbing out my clothes.

He places all but my pants on the blanket and he holds it out to me, I still look at him with curiosity. "Come hear, I want to help you" he states.

I approach him slowly, as he holds out the pants for me. I gingerly hold onto his shoulders as I step into my pants, but as I do so, Mike places gentle kisses against my waist. The feeling is blissful, and

gentle. He's not trying to start anything, but instead is trying to convene something into this gesture.

He helps me pull them up and ties my drawstring. Next, he grabs my vests and approaches me from behind as he slips it on around me as he kisses my neck and shoulders. He spins me around and meticulously buttons it up.

Next, he pulls out my white shirt and drifts it over my head, and fastens it the way he knows I like it, in which holds my breasts just right, so I seem flat like a man.

Once he finishes, he grabs my hair band, and thoroughly plays with my hair so it's pulled back and twisted. He then takes my hat and places it snuggle against my head. With one last tug, he gives me a gentle smile and pecks my lips, he gives me a hazy look. "How did I get so lucky?" he coos.

I can't help but think the same. The movements he just performed with dressing me felt entirely different. Knowing that like any man, he would rather have me undressed, but with the motions of dressing me, so genuinely, it showed a different part to Mike, and I can't help but swoon.

For, the message was clear: he loves me, no matter in what state of dress or what role I must play, for, he loved me for all my being.

My eyes water a bit, as I relish in his message, so before they come, I bend down to grab his clothes, and begin the same motions as Mike did.

I assist him with his pants and overshirt, following the same movements as he did. And placing sweet kisses here and there. I do this not to copy him, but to show him that even though we didn't become one last night, that I will always love him for who he is, and knowing that our time will come.

Soon, we are fully clothed and we are embracing each other once again. Silently, we stand our arms around one another, basking in the quietness that echoes through the forest.

All too soon, we finally leave our little oasis. We walk hand and hand, attempting to hold onto our small moment here, knowing that we will definitely return one day.

Once we reach the town's line, we break our locked hands, I begin to move forward, but Mike grabs my arms, spins me to him and gives me a long tender kiss. It's almost like breathing when we kiss like this. It's become so natural, a second part to our lives.

After we break from each other we stare into the other's deep brown eyes, "I love you, El" Mike says, and I give him an endearing look, "And I love you more, Mike" I whisper.

He laughs and shakes his head, "No, I love you more" he challenges, as we continue to walk into town. We banter back and forth with who loves who more, a bit more quietly as we approach people.

"No Mike, there's no way possible that-" I try but I'm cut off by a "Hey, there they are!", knowing very well who the voice belongs to.

Both Mike and I stop and turn to see the owner of said loud voice, we smile at each other as we watch Dustin, Lucas and Will come trampling through the crowd to catch up to us.

The curly haired boy has a wide grin on his face as he approaches us, he throws one of his arms around me and one around Mike, he pulls our heads into his chest. Mike and I both let out a breath of air at the contact.

"Well look who it is" he chuckles, as Mike and I try to break free, Will and Lucas coming around to face us.

Lucas is laughing, "Yeah, it's the love birds" he coos, although he thankfully whispers this part. I roll my eyes and turn to Will, who seems to be frowning a bit, which surprises me.

Dustin finally releases us and gives us a quick once over, "So" he elongates, "Where did you two sneak off to last night?" he questions, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

Both Mike and I sigh, "That's our own business" I huff. And Mike nods his head in agreement.

Lucas laughs into our face, "Oh sure" he says poking Mike in the chest, "I bet *someone* made a certain *someone* into a man last night" he chirps.

I shake my head at the two idiotic boys, "Not that you really need to know, but -" I start frustrated but Mike cuts me off, "Like El said, you honestly don't need to know" he says haughtily.

Dustin and Lucas both groan, "Oh, come, on guys!" Dustin enunciates each word. "You two are the only one's in a 'relationship' between us five, we've got to know the deets!" he waves his arms about frantically.

"No we don't", Will mutters as he looks away awkwardly. But Dustin and Lucas don't let up, "Come on Mike, lay it down for us", he says throwing an arm around his shoulder.

Mike looks at him incredulously and shrugs the arm off of his shoulder, he comes to stand next to me.

He raises his arms in the air, "You know what, fine, we had mind blowingly, amazing sex, that you two idiots, will never have in your life!" he spits at them.

I blush a bit at his rash statement, knowing he's only saying it to get them off of our backs, but I can't hold back the chuckle as I watch all three of their faces change. Each of their eyes wide and mouths wide open.

Mike and I look at each other for a moment, then we turn back to our friends. "Uh, you guys okay?" Mike asks unsure.

Soon, Lucas begins to blink his eyes, but then a smile spreads across his face, and Dustin mimics him as well, "Oh my god, Mike, you've got to tell us everything!" Lucas bellows as he and Dustin rush the poor guy. Mike's face going white with shock, knowing his plan backfired.

Dustin and Lucas grab onto Mike as they pepper him with questions as they continue to walk down the street. Will and I fall beside each other, walking a good distance behind the three guys. I shake my

head, but can't help but laugh at the sight before me.

I turn to look at Will beside me, but his appearance has me concerned. As we walk he has his arms wrapped tightly around his midsection, and his eyes are locked onto the cobblestone path that we are walking.

I tentatively place a hand on his shoulder, "Hey, is, everything okay?" I ask him. At my touch he jumps a bit, as if I had just electrocuted him. He looks at me quickly and then back down to the path, he shakes his head quickly, "No, no, nothing's wrong" he mutters.

My eyes narrow, knowing that something is indeed wrong. I move my body in front of him, and he knocks against me, our eyes meet for a second, but then he's looking down again.

I put both of my hands on his shoulders this time, I move my head, desperately trying to meet his gaze, but he stays focused on the ground, avoiding me.

"Will?" I say softly, "There's obviously something wrong. Please tell me".

I watch him for a moment, when finally he gradually raises his head and looks me dead in the eyes, "It's...." he tries but shakes his head again.

"Will, you can talk to me", I plead, but he doesn't budge. I think for a moment, then an idea hits me, "Is it about Mike and I?" I ask, already knowing the answer.

Will lets out a sigh, and looks at me again, "Yes", he whispers. I sigh as well and bring his head so we are looking into each other's eyes, "Are you worried?" I ask gently.

His eyes move across my face, trying to gauge what he wants to say next, "I...just don't want you...to get hurt" he admits.

My mouth moves to a half smile, and then I pull the boy who's always been like a brother to me into my embrace. "Will, you don't have to worry" I promise him.

I feel Will return the hug, but he pulls back, "I...I just don't want Mike...to use you" he confesses looking a little ashamed about his feelings.

I shake my head, "Mike would *never* hurt or use me" I tell the boy honestly. Will lets out a breath, "I-I-I know this" he stutters, "But, it's just hard, knowing, that you guys are-" he stops as he gestures with his hands.

This time I let out a laugh, and Will looks at me a bit hurt, but I smile at him, "Will, nothing happened" I explain.

But Will not taking it, he gives me a halfway glance, "Then where were you last night?" he asks.

I roll my eyes, "We...spent the night together yes" I start, watching Will's eyes go wide, "But Will, we sleep in the same hammock every night-" I attempt to explain but Will cuts me off stepping back a bit, "But, this time you guys, ugh-" he shivers at his thoughts.

I chuckle again, "No, Will, we honestly didn't" I stress. The boy looks at me hard, "Then why did Mike say that you did?" he asks earnestly.

"Because Dustin and Lucas wouldn't let him off without saying something. Besides, I'm sure he wanted a bit of pride as well".

Will turns the statement over in his head, "But, I mean, we did fool around a bit" I tease to the awkward boy, who slaps his hands to his ears, "Uh, no! Did *not* need to hear that!" he grimaces.

I let out a long laugh at the poor boy, as I pull at his hands, "And you'd be proud to know, Mike was the one who was against doing it, because he didn't want to get me pregnant" I explain as Will desperately tried to pull his hand from my grasps.

"Whatever, I don't want to know what you two did, gross!" he states, as he walks away from him. I follow him closely, teasing and prodding him, loving the way he tries to elude me as I feed him fake details of mine and Mike's night together.

"La, la, la, I can't hear you!" he yells, but I only chase after him, laughing at his misery all the way to the docks.

It's been a couple of days since mine and Mike's night together. And it has definitely become harder to keep our hands to ourselves, and our longing glances hidden. The boys have warned us more than once to be careful, as we are being a bit too obvious. So, we try to focus on our work and not each other. But the task proves difficult.

All of the King's ships who will be rallying with us to the monster's nest, have all finally arrived in the harbor. The boys and I go to the top of a steep hill overlooking the harbor.

All our our eyes widen as we gaze upon each ship that bobs up and down against the gentle waves.

There's at least sixty ships in total, ranging in different shapes and sizes. There are only two that dwarf the *Hawk*. In which I thought was impossible. However, the mighty *Crusade* and *Rebel* have almost another hundred plus feet to the *Hawk*.

These ships are also much more decked out and are booming warships. My eyes marvel at their revere. Guns and cannons are unmistakably lined barely five feet from one another. And the men who disembark the ships are just as mighty.

After the last ships finally dock in the harbor, the ships Captain's hold a great meeting in one of the town halls. Attack plans and strategies have been laid out, while each and every ship has been armored well past the usual.

Even our dainty *Hawk* has acquired a new look. She now has metal flanks that protect her most vulnerable spots, which are on her port and starboard sides. The metal adds a devilish look to our fine ship, and I can't help but feel a bit relieved when I see that she is a bit more protected.

After the Captain's have met, Captain Hopper pulls members of the crew who are able bodied seaman and up into a large local pub. Here, he explains the tactics of what is going to go down.

"It'll take about two or so weeks, depending on the weather and wind, to get to the monster's island" Captain Hopper bellows to us, who are

all watching him intently.

"The plan is to move in fleets divided into three", he holds up his large hand holding up three fingers. "Then, we will approach the island from three angles, the smaller ships will break through the guard. While the larger ships, including us, will make a beeline straight to the island" he talks loudly.

"Once we are in position we will pull to starboard side and surround the island. And we will all release our mighty cannons, and sink that dreaded island to the sea itself!" he pumps his fist into the air victoriously, and cheers from our crew erupt all around us.

The boys and I sit near the back in a dark corner. Lucas and Dustin have had a couple of drinks and are starting to get a little rowdy, as they raise their tankards into the air and cheer loudly, and then downing their drinks, which slops down their shirt fronts.

I'm thankful Mike is a bit more reserved. He sits next to me and gives me a wide grin. Knowing that the Captain's words are empowering for all of us.

I casually look about and take in all the men. Jonathan and Steve have draken quite a bit too, as they are disheveled, but cheering and singing along with the rest of the Midshipman. Even Mr. Clarke is a bit red faced, as he stutteringly attempts to explain a scientific discovery to any other drunk man who will listen.

I shake my head at the men, who I have come to call my family, and my heart sinks a bit, thinking about the coming fight among us.

Deep down I worry greatly about what might happen, knowing, solemnly, that not everyone will make it out of this fight. And I pray greatly everyday, that it is none from my closest crew.

I'm brought out of my thoughts when I hear someone grumbling behind me, "Bloody fools".

I turn my head around and set my eyes on a young woman. My eyes trail over her as I watch her movements. Her hair is the reddest color I have ever laid eyes on, and the length trails close to her waist.

She wears a deep frown on her face as she picks up discarded tankards and wipes away the stickiness from the wooden tables with a brown table rag. Another cheer erupts through the tavern, and I see her head raise to the noise, when her eyes catch mine, and we stare at each other for a moment.

I can tell she's evaluating me, but soon looks away. She grabs the forgotten tankards, tosses them behind the bar, and exits out a back door. I watch it swing for a bit, my thoughts playing in my mind, *what did she mean by, 'bloody fools?'* My brain asks again and again. Not shaking the thoughts and not seeing the girl return, I whisper over to Mike, "I'm going to the bathroom", he nods his head, "Okay, be safe" he whispers back. I give him a quick smile and turn to the back door, hoping to find the girl.

I open the back door hesitantly as I look from side to side. It's a small alleyway, that is littered with boxes and barrels, I'm assuming is from the tavern.

I step out cautiously, taking in my surroundings as I let the door close behind me. I walk down the alleyway a bit, I look around and see nothing, sighing I go to turn back towards the tavern, when I feel a coldness on my neck, "Make a move, and I'll slice your throat", a cool voice plays into my ears.

I tense at the feeling of the blade against my neck and swallow slowly, I raise my hands in surrender, "I just, want to talk" I stutter out.

The person behind me laughs chillingly, "That's what they all say. Before they push you up against the rough stone wall and try to have their way with me. You men are all the same" she hisses.

My eyes go wide at her statement, my heart feeling the worry of what this girl has been through. I open my mouth to speak, "What if I told you...I wasn't like other guys?" I try.

"Heh, yeah, like that's ever true" her grips tightens against me. "No, I mean it" I try again, but the blade presses against my throat, and now it moves against my skin as I speak again, "I'm not a man" I say firmly.

At this I feel her grip loosen just a tad, "Yeah, right, I saw you in there, watching me" she seethes. I tentatively shake my head, "No, I was just admiring you", I mentally slap myself at my choice of words.

"What!" she growls pulling tighter, "No, sorry, not like that" I beg, as I'm sure she's one word away from slicing my neck open.

"I meant, I'd never seen a girl with hair as red as yours, and I thought it was pretty compared to mine" I soften. The girl still holds me, but listens, so I continue, "But, it's what you said, that caught me, and I had to talk to you", I explain.

I can feel her hot breath against my neck, her sheer determination held on by the fear she's had. "Please" I plead, "I'm a girl" I whisper.

"How do I know you're not trying to trick me?" she asks, her voice shaking. "I can show you, if you let me go, I promise, I won't hurt" I explain calmly.

Finally, I feel her pull the blade away from my throat, and she pushes me roughly, in which I stumble forward, I catch myself. I turn towards her, and see her, the knife held out in front of her.

"Prove it" she hisses. I nod my head, and slowly reach up to my hat, which I tug off and then pull my hair out of my tie. It falls loosely around my head, so I fluff it up a bit. Then I reach down and unbutton my top, just barely revealing my chest.

I watch as the girls eyes go wide, "You weren't joking" she marvels at me. I smile and shake my head, "No, I wasn't" I agree, as I re-button my top and throw my hair back up to its normal state.

She watches me, "How in the world, did you manage to pull that off" she says admirably. I laugh, "Lot's of practice".

She points to the door behind her, "So, all those men, think your one as well?" she questions. My smile widens a bit, "No, the Captain knows and the boys who are my age, all know" I say.

Her mouth drops open, "The *Captain* knows you're a girl, and he let you on the ship?!" she asks shocked.

I shake my head, "It's a long story, my brother and I joined the crew years ago, and I did so under the disguise of a boy", I explain. "And, one of the boys, Mike, we both liked each other, and I had to tell him so he thought he wasn't going crazy. Then the other two found out...after they caught Mike and I...well...kissing" I hesitate.

I watch as the fiery headed girl shake her head in disbelief, "That's amazing", she says, and I smile at her.

I approach her slowly and stick out my hand, "My names Eleanor, but Elliot as a boy, but everyone calls me El" I explain, watching the girl. She gives a half smile as she grasps my hand with hers and she gives it a firm shake, "The names Maxine, but everyone calls me Max" she says.

"Well, Max, if you wouldn't mind, I'd like to ask you about what you meant by, 'bloody fools'?" I ask her.

I watch as Max bites onto her lip, contemplating. "Please Max, there's something you know, about what's going to happen, and I need to know" I plead to her.

She continues to be silent, when finally she lets her shoulders relax and she huffs, "Fine, I'll tell you" she says.

Max walks over to two barrels, and sits down at one and gestures for me to follow suit. I sit on the other upturned barrel and place my attention on the redheaded girl.

She lets out a long breath, "Let me start at the beginning".

Okay, leaving it on my first cliffhanger! I am SOOOOO sorry for the long wait again! This cold beat me down and it was awful! Also, I've wanted to introduce Max for awhile and FINALLY got an idea as to what I want to do, and am excited for this!

I hope you are all enjoying this story! Please let me know what you thought about this chapter and Max's arrival, so PLEASE REVIEW! I will hopefully have another chapter up in a couple of days!

THANK YOU ALL FOR THE REVIEWS FROM THE LAST CHAPTER,

YOU ARE ALL AWESOME! And I just want you to know, as many have asked, there will be NO MAJOR CHARACTER DEATH, I PROMISE! I could NEVER kill off Eleven or Mike, they are just too cute!

22. Storytime

Ok, as always, you all rock! Thank you for the reviews as always, they are so well appreciated and I love reading each and every one of them! I'm so glad you all liked the inclusion of Max, my original intention was to not include her at all, but I got an idea as to how I want to use her, and I think everyone will enjoy it!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of View:

I sit uncomfortably on the upturned barrel in the dank alley, it's dark outside, but Max's red hair stands vibrant against it, and I watch her intently as she starts in on her story.

"I've been here for almost five years", she starts, her face solemn and sad. I study her closely, waiting patiently for her to continue.

Max opens her mouth to speak, but hesitates, and she tries again, "I-I was born in Ireland" she explains. "And, I was accompanying my father on one of his trade trips".

She looks at me with her deep blue eyes, and I nod to her that I'm listening, so she continues, "My father, he was a small tradesman and he usually just traveled about the coast, and he was home monthly".

"He always had successful trips, so, big name traders looked into him and stationed him to Captain a larger ship to South America", she says, looking down to her lap, in which she fiddles with her hands.

I can tell this is emotional for her, so I wait for her to speak. "My father and I were close, and he didn't want to leave me behind, you see, I have two younger siblings, so my mother couldn't go".

"It took a lot of persuading, but my mother finally agreed to let me go, even though it would be almost a year and a half of us gone", she looks up from her lap and I can tell her eyes are watering a bit.

"So, we boarded the ship, named *Crimson Tide*. It was a magnificent

ship, large and powerful", Max's eyes go wide at her memory. "But, it wasn't decked out in full guns since we would be traveling the safe route. And...we thought everything was going to be okay" Max whispers.

"What happened?" I can't help but asking the girl. Max lets out a shuddering breath, "Everything was fine, until we got near the bermuda triangle. We had heard the stories of ships disappearing, but we also didn't believe in the stories either".

"And, we hadn't even known about the monsters", ours eyes meet, and they are wide with fear, I lean closer hanging on each of her words.

"It had been a couple months into our trip....when it struck" Max says, and I scan her wildly with my eyes.

"The weather had been beautiful, clear sky's and crystal clear water, but in moments, it all went to hell. Clouds rolled in as fast as a race horse, and the rain drilled into our skin like tiny needles. That's when we heard the cries", her eyes scan my face, looking for any reaction, but I wait.

"Within moments, our ship was being surrounded by...these creatures", Max stands from her barrel and moves about. "They had long, gangly arms, covered in a slimy skin", she gestures to her arms and pretending to elongate them. She moves her hands up to her face and fans them out to each side of her face, "They had no eyes, but a large flower like mouth, poised with razor sharp teeth!" she shudders.

"My dad desperately tried to get us to land, and the only piece we could see, it was like it came out of nowhere. We headed towards the shore, but the storm raged, and the monsters kept attacking. It was as if when we killed one, another took its spot", Max said with raised eyebrows.

"But, my dad's men fought valiantly and killed off every monster that landed on our deck. We finally made it close to shore, when the monsters stopped for some reason. We believed that it was all over", Max said, but then shook her head lowly, "But we were wrong".

"There was something on the land, a lot different from the monsters that were attacking us. And we noticed that there was something looming there....that's when we heard the heart shattering shriek pierce the air", she explained, as I continued to listen to her words, being sure to grasp what she was saying.

"Out of the shadows and haze, I could just barely make out the outline of what looked like a two headed beast. It had to have been over thirty feet tall" she stressed her voice.

"And it had two long, hooked arms, and a tail that dragged behind it. The beast turned towards us and let out a terrifying shriek, and....that's when the monsters attacked again".

"But, this time, there were more, and they were quicker and stronger than the last one's. I watched my father and his men, try so desperately to keep them at bay, but they were hardly holding them off", I see a tear trickle down her cheek.

"A-A-And my father, told the men at the helm to turn away from the shore. I watched in horror as the large beast, would brandish the ground, in which a monster would form, and readily head towards us" Max looks at me with a straight face, "That's the queen, she controls the other monsters, and if you don't kill her, no one....will make it out alive", she finishes quietly.

I sit back as far as I can on the small barrel, and take in Max's words, and I give her a questioning look, "But, how did you survive?" I ask quickly.

Max let's out a breath, "There were a handful of men who were able to keep the ship intact from the monster's onslaught , they managed the ship while the other men fought. My dad told me to hide, so I did. I found the deepest part of the ship, where I curled up into a ball and waited for all the bloodshed to stop", another tear escapes her eye.

"When I heard the terrible screaming stop, after what seemed like hours, I finally went above deck to find out what had happened. And going up on deck, looking at the sky and sea, it was like nothing happened. But the ship told a different story, it was covered in blood

and death, it truly earned its name that day" she says softly.

I feel my eyes water at her words as well, feeling the pain and sadness emitting from the girl. I reach out and place my hand on top of hers, which is resting on her lap, I give it a reassuring squeeze. Max looks up, eyes brimming with tears and I nod my head a bit "You don't have to finish if you don't want to" I say trying to comfort the girl. But she shakes her head, "No, I want to tell the story, to warn you" she pleads.

I nod my head, and wait for her to continue. She takes in a deep breath, "The ship was in shambles, and there were barely fifteen men still alive, my father, he..." but Max stopped short, tears were cascading down her cheek now.

She let out a small cry, squeezing her eyes tightly, truly not wanting to relive the awful memories, but her will pushing her on, she takes in a ragged breath, "He died", Max squeaks out, "Defending the ship and protecting me" she cries, looking at me, and I give her a soft glance.

"The *Crimson Tide*, barely made it to land, here" she gestures to the ground around us. "A-A-And when we did make land, the men aboard were so shaken by the event, they left the ship in the harbor, where it was disassembled and used as spare parts".

I give her a look, "But what about you?" I ask. She gives a half smile, "I begged the men on the ship to help me get back home, but they pushed me off, and said they would never travel the seas again. So, I desperately tried to get on a ship to take me home, but around here, it's very rare for a ship to be traveling so far north, and I don't want to get stuck anywhere else", she says sadly.

"That's terrible" I honestly say to the girl. She nods her head, "Yeah. I was lucky and Ms. Tilly took me in, and I've been here ever since, checking every week to see if a ship was heading to Ireland. But, I fear I will never be lucky" Max looks down, playing with her dress.

I take in Max's story, and my heart breaks for her, knowing that the ordeal she went through was truly terrifying. And that her only wish was to get back home.

But another more pressing thought pushes to the front of my brain, "So, you mean to say, that there's a queen on that island?" I question gently.

Max doesn't look at me, but she nods her head slowly, "Yes. It summons the monsters, that's where they come from, and they'll keep attacking if you don't stop her first".

I mull her words over in my head, and fear runs through me quickly. My eyes go wide at the realization: that if we go against this island, we're all probably going to perish, because no one knew about the queen. My heart sinks.

I grab onto Max quickly and she gives me a questioning look, "You have to tell this to our Captain" I say shakily.

It's Max's turn to give me a quizzical look, "What do you mean?" she shakes her head. "You know the truth, you know about where the monsters come from, we have to let Captain Hopper know and-" I try but am cut off by Max, "He won't believe me" she says stone faced.

I give her a smile, "Yes. He will, trust me" I urge the girl, still grabbing ahold of her. She's looking at me carefully, trying to take me in, but she finally nods her head, "Okay" she whispers.

And at that I jump to my feet, "Stay here, I'll be right back" I hurriedly tell the girl, and rush inside.

Going back inside, the smell of stale ale fills the air, and it's hot and sticky from the amount of bodies in the room. I see Mike and the rest of the boys still at our table, they are laughing and singing to one of our crewmates playing the penny whistle and concerta.

It's loud and almost dizzying, but I set my sights on the boys, I place my hand on Mike's shoulder, he turns towards me with a wide grin, "Hey, El!" he says joyfully. By a whiff of his breath and elevated mood, I can tell he's draken a bit more, but still seems to be holding it together.

I get close to his ear so he can hear me over the loudness of the tavern, "Take the boys and meet me out in the alley, go through that

door", I point over my shoulder to where I just entered.

Mike gives me a curious glance, "Why?" he asks. I roll my eyes, "Will you just do it please, for me?" I bat my eyelashes at him, and give him a look. He lets out a huff, but still smiles, "Of course" he says, and I return the gesture and head off to find Hopper.

I move through the crowd of rowdy men, when tucked back in the corner I finally lay my eyes on the man I've been seeking. He's holding a tankard close to him, and sips from it gingerly, taking in the sight around him.

Our eyes meet as I approach, he scrunches his eyebrows together, as he sees my quick pace towards him.

"Captain Hopper", I give him a small bow. "Kid" he says plainly, waiting for me to say something. "I-I've got something I need to talk about" I stutter, and barely meet his intense stare.

He's still looking at me curiously, I go to speak as his eyes go wide, "Don't tell me kid" he says gruffly, rubbing one of his large hands across his face. It's my turn to give him a curious look, "What-" I start but he holds his hand up.

"Kid" he sighs, looking at me, "I thought I told you, I didn't want any little Mike Wheeler's to be running around the ship!", he harshly whispers to me.

I'm taken aback by his notion, and startle a bit, shaking my head, but feeling my face flame in embarrassment, "No, no, Hopper", I actually manage a half smile at his idiocy. I look at the large man whose now giving me a harsh look, "Hopper?" he says.

"It's just easier...sorry...but...no, that's not important, and no I'm not pregnant or any-", Hopper cuts me off, "Oh thank god", he breathes out holding a hand to his chest.

I roll my eyes, "Hopper. You need to listen" I stress too him. And finally I have his attention on me. "What is it?" he asks now intrigued.

"There's something I just learned about the monster's nest, and you need to hear it" I tell him. Hopper looks me over, "And where did you

find this information?" he questions.

"A reputable source" I say, grabbing onto his hand and dragging him behind me, not leaving him a chance to say no, but he follows nonetheless as I pull him out into the alley.

As I pull Hopper into the alley, I'm met with an interesting sight, and that's Mike and Will standing off to the side, shaking their heads at the sight of liquored up Dustin and Lucas who are a little too close to Max's person for her, and mines, liking.

I roll my eyes as I watch the interaction. Poor Max is looking startled by the boys who are coming onto her, too aggressively in my opinion.

"You're pretty" I hear Dustin stutter to the girl, "Yeah, you have really red hair" Lucas attempts to flirt. I walk up to the pathetic boys, grab their collars and yank them back, they both let out, "Hey's!" as I drag them back.

"You two are pathetic! Leave the poor girl alone!", I chastise them, swatting the back of their heads, while Mike and Will laugh at their friends.

"But, El...you didn't say there would be a pretty girl back here", Dustin stutters, and sways a bit. I huff, "Focus, you idiots, I didn't ask Mike to bring you back here to torment Max", I gesture to the girl, who seems relieved to have the boys free from her space.

"Max", Lucas sighs, "What a pretty name" he slurs a bit. I give both of the boys another wack for good measure.

"So, what's this girl got to do with anything?" Hopper's gruff voice breaks between us. I look at the large man, "You need to listen to her story. It's true. And without her information, we're sure to be dead facing the monster's nest" I explain.

Hopper gives me a look, and then gives Max a once over, she doesn't turn away from his somewhat aggressive look. He seems unsure, but he sighs, "Fine, tell us what you know" Hopper motions to the girl, as he sits on my abandoned barrel.

Max looks at us all with wide eyes, taking us all in. I stand next to Mike and take his hand, since it is only our small group back here. Max takes one more look at me and I motion with my head that it's all good.

Max takes in a deep breath and begins her tale that she told me.

"And...that's what happened", Max finishes re-telling the boys and Hopper her story. It seemed a little easier for her the second time around. But, I still look at the boys faces, and I'm not sure if it's to get her attention or the alcohol, but Lucas and Dustin are tearing up. Will has a solemn look on his face, and Mike is gripping my hand firmly.

Max evaluates each of us, waiting for someone to speak. I turn my attention to Hopper, he's stroking his even beard between his fingers, contemplating.

Finally, Hopper lets out a sigh, "How do we know this is the truth?" the question aimed at me, as he turns his head towards me.

I startle a bit and open my mouth to speak, "How can she not be, I mean, it's the same description you said about the island, and Will and I have seen the monsters, and she described them perfectly" I defend.

Hopper takes in my words, "I'm not sure kid", he mutters standing and cracking his back. I stare at him dumbfounded, I let go of Mike's hand and approach the Captain, I poke him in the chest, "What does it matter if it's the truth or not!" my voice raises. "What matters, is that we take precaution, to form a new plan, so that we can take out the queen and walk away with our lives!" I bark at Hopper.

I feel my chest rise and fall quickly as I'm getting worked up. Hopper gives me an even glare, "Kid, look, even if it's the truth, what's her word against all the other Captain's, do you really think they'd believe me?" he asks earnestly.

Letting myself calm a bit, I think on Hopper's words, he has a point. "We need them to believe", I plead. Hopper places a calm hand on my shoulder, "I know kid, and look, Max's story makes sense, because

honestly, when we went there last, it was like those monster's were coming out of nowhere".

"Then we need to come up with a new plan" I stress to gruff man. Hopper lets out a tentative breath, "I'll try kid" he says as he turns towards Max.

She gives him a curious look as he looks her over, "El, help her get into sailor's gear, she's coming with us", he states out of the blue, as he turns to head back into the tavern.

Max jumps to her feet, and the boys and I let out shocked breaths. "What do you mean?" Max asks nervously. Hopper looks at all of us, "She gave us valuable information, the least we can do is when we make it out of the fight *alive*", he stresses, "We have no choice but to bring her home". A smile creeps up on my face, and I see Max's do the same as her mouth hangs open in shock.

"Besides, if she's lying, she would be begging not to come" he explains, but Max shakes her head, "No, I'm not lying, and I'm willing to risk anything, *anything*, to stop the monsters and get back home" she expresses.

Hopper gives her a nod and his small smile, "Good, be ready by morning then" are his last words as he turns to leave us in the alleyway, all a bit speechless.

We all observe each other for a moment, and Max is the first to speak, "I might finally get a chance to go home" she whispers.

I approach the girl and grab her hands, "We will all make sure you make it home", I say encouragingly.

The boys surround us now, "You'll be a great addition to the crew Max", says Will. "Yeah, and you can share my hammock by the way", Dustin wriggles his eyebrows.

"What?" Max looks hesitant. "I'm the only one with room so..." Dustin shrugs his shoulder. "That's not fair, why does she get to sleep with you!?" Lucas exclaims. And then as always, they are back and forth with each other.

Max lets out a nervous sigh, I turn to look at her, "Don't worry, we will put them together in a hammock, and you can share with Will", I nod my head to the said boy.

Will smiles, "Yeah, I promise I won't bite" he jokes. Max grins at this, "Yes, I'd much rather share a hammock with someone who isn't going to be all over me", she admits.

Dustin and Lucas hear this part of our conversation, "What, no, Dustin and I aren't sharing a hammock!" Lucas exclaims and Dustin nods his head furiously in agreement.

"Why do you and Mike get to share a hammock, why can't El and Max share one?" Dustin asks curiously. Mike rolls his eyes, "It's a little different. El and I are together" he says putting an arm around my shoulder, and pulling me close, and he gives me a small kiss to my forehead. I grin at the contact.

"Ugh...ew, you two are gross", Lucas exclaims, "It's still not fair" he finishes. Max rolls her eyes, "Mike and El can stay together, they deserve that much, and I'll share with Will" Max smiles at the youngest boy.

"Besides Dustin, you've had a hammock all to yourself for two years, I think you and Lucas can manage", Will points out.

Both Lucas and Dustin let out exasperated groans, but finally give in on the matter. I come closer to Max, "Come on, we need to get you rigged out, so you can pass as a boy", I wink to her, as I drag her back to the ship.

Thankfully I held onto my old uniform in which I had made for myself, and I pull Max into one of my old hiding holes.

I find another old shirt, in which she too has to wear under her overshirt to hold down her chest. "How do you breath like this?" she asks as she pulls her undershirt over her head and takes in a dramatic deep breath.

I chuckle as I watch her, "Years of practice" I admit, handing her the

over shirt, which she pulls over her head.

Max is smaller in the chest area than I ended up being. Not that I'm complaining, especially since Mike and I have been together, but Max will have an easier time hiding than I did.

"You're lucky you can keep your name", I admit out loud. "What do you mean?" she asks as she pulls on my old pants.

"I had to change mine so that it would fit", I say. Max pulls on my old pants and ties the string, "What's your real name?" she questions.

"Eleanor", I state. She shrugs her shoulder, "It's not too different from, El", she states. I nod my head, "Yeah, Will came up with my fake name, 'Elliot', out of the blue, thankfully I still was able to have my nickname" I admit.

Max smiles to me, "I like 'El' better anyways", I return her smile, "Yeah, me too".

Once Max is in my old gear, I stand behind her and attempt to play with her hair, after many failed attempts, I let go of her long, red tresses and let out a frustrated huff. "What's wrong?" Max asks turning her head a bit.

"It's your hair, it's so long and thick, that I can't get it up right like mine" I say defeated. Max is silent for a bit, "You...can always cut it", she suggests.

I move around so we are looking into each others eyes, "Are you sure?" I ask her quietly. Max waits a moment but then nods her head, "Yes, whatever you need".

I move my head up and down in agreeance, "Okay, I won't cut it too short, but just enough to tie it up and into a hat" I say.

I go over to my bag and pull out the shiv Joyce had given Will and I, all those years ago. My heart pangs against my chest, not having held the shiv for a long time. And my mind wanders to Joyce, and thinking about what she might be doing now.

"El?" I hear Max's voice, and I shake my head out of its thoughts and

approach her, knowing that there's no need to be sad. "You read?" I ask her.

She slowly nods her head, 'yes', I grab a handful of Max's gorgeous red locks, measure up to her shoulder, and cut it in one swift moment.

Max let's out a gasp, as I swipe at her hair, I take a step back, and Max puts a hand behind her, to feel the missing ten inches of her hair.

"Wow", she breathes, and I nod in agreement. "How does it look?" she questions. I give her a strong smile, "It looks good", I tell her honestly, and she beams in return.

I left enough for Max to be able to pull the remainder of her hair into a tight pony tail, and her hair is short enough to make her look like an atypical boy. I have Dustin's hat I made him, that he no longer wears, since his hair is so curly and out of control. I place it delicately over Max's red curls, fix it just right, and I take a step back to look at my work.

Max holds out her hands and spins, "So, how do I look?" she asks somewhat excited. I give her a wide grin, "Like a boy", I sigh, thinking of when I had to do the same, all those years ago.

Max and I make our way to our sleeping corters, and I have her stand behind me, as the boys are grouped together, talking and waiting for our return.

I clear my throat loudly, and the boys stop their talking and turn eagerly towards me, "Boys, I give you our newest addition to our Brotherhood, Max!" I say excitedly, stepping away from Max, who is standing with her chin held high and hands on her hips.

Dustin and Lucas, mouth hang open, while Will and Mike nod in satisfaction. "Wow El, you did a great job!" Mike admires my work, as he stands next to me, I give him a quick peck on the cheek in thanks, as he wraps his arms around me while the other boys take Max in.

"Yeah, now we see how El got away with it for so long, she knows

how to make a girl look like a boy, that's for sure", Dustin admits as he approaches Max, whose smiling at the curly haired boy.

"Now she'll have to get a tattoo to match!" Lucas exclaims, and Max's eyes go wide in panic, "What?!" she screams.

We all laugh, and we each pull down our pants enough to just expose our tattoos, "Yeah, about three years ago we got these beauties, they link us together" Dustin exclaims happily.

Max examines each of our markings, she runs her hand over Dustin's who is closest to her, "That tickles!" he giggles, while Max gives him a look.

We pull the sides back up and I approach Max, "You don't have to if you don't want to" I explain to her, but she smiles, "Maybe after the battle, I'll get one" she shrugs.

We all grin about one another. "Let's make a blood pact at least" Dustin suggests, and we all nod in agreement.

I pull my shiv out once again, I cut into my left hand enough to draw blood and pass the shiv onto Mike who does the same. We stand in a circle, as we each draw blood.

Once Will finishes his cut, I hold out my hand face up, Mike places his on top of mine, he gives me a cute smile, which I return. The rest of the boys and Max do the same. "The Brotherhood forever" Dustin whispers, "The Brotherhood forever", we all mutter in return, smiling at our new group.

Our blood now conjoined together in an unforgettable bond.

Yes! So glad to have gotten this chapter completed! Thank you all for your patience, it's so well appreciated, and thank you all for your reviews again, I love, love, love them so much!

Just an important note, I have class again all weekend :(and they are long days, so there's no way I'll be able to work on the story. So, it won't be till next week till the next chapter, which I'm so sorry about!

Thank you all again! As always, PLEASE REVIEW! Love them everytime!

23. Town Hall

As always I can't get over your guy's reviews! They are so awesome to read, and to gain feedback from! I'm so happy you all enjoyed the inclusion of Max into the story as well!

Also, someone asked what happened to Tommy, he died, quite a few chapters ago. And, I'm not sure about bringing Billy into the story. Right now my main antagonist is the Demogorgon and such. And, I'm ready to bring the story in a full circle as I'm trying to wrap it up soon :(Which I hate to say, but it's getting close. I have another story playing out in my head, but not really sure as to where to go with it, so, we will see.

Anyways, on with the story!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of View:

After our symbolic gesture to each other, I watch as Max gives a wide yawn, "Why don't we turn in for the night, it's late, and I want to be up in time to see how Hopper's meeting goes with the other Captain's" I state looking about our small group.

Everyone gives a resounding head nod as each group fetches their hammock to hang for the night. As such a routine, Mike and I each grab an end of our hammock and we walk to each hook and hang it with ease, as we tie each end sturdily.

I watch Will show Max how to set up their hammock, and she watches with wonder, as he explains the right knot to use, so as to not end up on the floor at night.

Dustin and Lucas on the other hand, are arguing once again. "No, you loop it, then pull, then back around again!" Dustin shouts. Lucas lets out a frustrated sigh, "No, idiot, you tie it, then loop and pull!" he argues.

They go back and forth, but then determine to tie it each their own

way on the side they chose. Will and I look at each other and shake our heads at their childness.

Once the hammocks have been hung, Mike moves to ours, where he holds the side just right, motioning with his head for me to go ahead, "After you, m'dear" he gives me a wide grin.

I shake my head at his foolery, "You're such a gentleman" I coo, brushing my hand against his thick locks, as I swing myself expertly into the hammock. It swings for a bit, as I steady myself, as Mike hops in behind me. We sway a bit more, and we both reach to pull down the left side of our hammock to observe Will and Max.

I can see Max looking at our hammock, and then back to hers and Will's a bit hesitantly. She meets my eyes, "Are you *sure* this will hold us?" she asks.

I give her a light chuckle, "Don't worry, if our hammock will hold, then so will yours", I say gently.

"Come on Max, I'll hold it for you, I know how to get in without flipping it", Will encourages the red head.

Max gives him a still nervous look but she nods, and waits for him to hold it open, which he does with ease, "Hop in" Will exclaims.

Max takes in a nervous breath, as she places one foot in the hammock, her leg wobbling a bit at the contact. "Yeah, now just slide your leg in and hop in like you're going to lay down", Will explains to her.

Max reaches out to grab the boys shoulder to steady herself, I watch her hold her breath as she jumps into the hammock, which rocks a little violently from the impact.

She lets out a small squeal, "I did it!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "Nice one!" I hear Dustin cheer from the other side. I look over to Mike who's smiling as well. I turn to look back at Will who just as practice, jumps in beside Max, as the hammock moves once again, Max squealing again in delight, "This is so cool!" she states, as the rest of us let out small laughs.

"Okay, our turn" I listen and watch Lucas say a bit hesitant, as he holds the hammock for Dustin, who hops in, much less gracefully, as his limbs hang out a bit.

"You're turn" Dustin tells Lucas, who lets out a long sigh, but he jumps in too, and very quickly another disagreement starts between them.

"Get your nasty foot out of my face!" Lucas yells at the curly haired boy. "Why don't you get your elbow out of my ribcage then!" Dustin fights back.

"Will you two shut up!" Mike hisses to them, as we've settled down into our hammock, our nightly routine of our hands intertwined together, as we stare at the faint glistening of eachothers eyes.

The two boys grunt in return as a few more sounds are made, and finally it seems they have calmed down enough where you can only hear the faint squeak of the hammock rocking back and forth.

I gaze at Mike, and he does so in return, "Goodnight" he barely whispers, "Goodnight" I return to him, as my eyes flutter close.

I silently remark at our group of misfits, and a secret smile lingers on my face, as I take in the minute sounds around me letting them lull me to sleep.

When, suddenly I hear a loud creek, then a thunderous thud is heard around us, Mike and I shoot up from our hammock and look over the edge, I can see Will and Max doing the same.

Finally I hear some moans and groans and then, Will and Max's laughter breaks through the darkness.

"Oh my god, you two are ridiculous!" Max laughs, as she points at the two, I'm finally able to make out two forms on the ground away from Mike and I.

"Ugh...that hurt", I hear Dustin grumble from the ground. "You hurt, you landed on top of me!" Lucas hisses. Mike and I look at each other and start to join in the laughter as well, enjoying our friends misery.

"You shouldn't have argued so much", I shake my head at the two boys who are standing and pulling their hammock with them.

"See Lucas, I told you my way was right!" Dustin barks to the other boy, "No, your end was the one that snapped off!" Lucas argues back.

The bickering only escalates the laughter, especially from Max, who's wiping the tears from her eyes, "Maybe you two were just too heavy for the poor hammock" she teases.

The boys let out long sighs, as they turn to re-hook and tie their hammock back up. "You need to do a double over knot", Will says.

Dustin huffs, "Yeah, yeah" he waves a hand to the boy, as both he and Lucas turn to retie their hammock.

After a bit more arguing and another attempt at getting into the hammock, the boys settle back down, as do the rest of us.

Sighs of relief fill the emptiness around us, Mike and I rejoin our hands as we finally let sleep overcome us, and no more events wrack us from our dreams.

We all stretch and awake the next morning as the sun filters in through the small cracks and crevices of the wood, bringing light to our dark quarters.

Mike jumps out of our hammock first, he turns back to reach for me, as he helps lift me up and out, lifting me from under my arms, as I steady my hands on his shoulders.

I let out a laugh as he settles me down and brings me in for a quick kiss, marveling at the fact that it's just our group on the ship, the rest of the men either on duty, or spending their time on land, doing god knows what.

We let our lips linger for just a bit longer than usual as we rub our noses affectionately into the others. I hear a gagging noise from behind us, I sigh, still holding close to Mike as I turn towards the noise, which is coming from Dustin and Lucas.

I roll my eyes at the two, "You two are ridiculous". "Not like you two, you guys are disgusting" Dustin grumbles. "It's too early to be watching that stuff go down" Lucas shakes his head.

I stick my tongue out at both of them, "You're just jealous" I sing song to them. They growl as they move to put their hammock away, and we follow along too.

We all climb the steps from our quarters to the upper deck. We blink in the bright sun, but I can't help but take in a deep breath of the warm, salty air that surrounds us. There's a cool breeze billowing about, making the hot sun less intense.

Mike leads the way as we go down the gangplank and make our way to the town hall in which I know Hopper will be asking the rest of the Captain's to meet. I can feel the anxiety begin to build within me, not knowing as to how well Hopper's words will be taken, especially since his information is coming from some girl he just met at a tavern.

Mike must sense it, because I can feel his dark eyes staring at me every now and then as he watches where we are walking. He comes up closer to me, and gives my shoulder a little nudge, "You okay?" he asks quietly.

I take in his words and mull them over in my head, *am I really okay?* I ask myself. Not knowing the answer I shrug my shoulders, feeling lost at my feelings on the whole situation. I cast my gaze downwards.

I feel Mike place a hand on my shoulder as he gives it a light squeeze, I finally look up and our eyes meet, and I see the light and hope that glimmers through his, especially once he gives me his famous smile that I fell in love with, "Don't worry" he whispers honestly.

And at those words, I can feel the anxiety somewhat diminished, feeling the determination and surety behind Mike's words. My mouth moves on it's own as it grows into a smile, "Thanks" I say back, giving his shoulder a bump in return, which makes him chuckle.

Approaching the town hall is daunting. Not knowing what will

commence inside makes my insides turn, but knowing I have Mike and my other friends by my side calm's me.

We enter the town hall slowly, and we scoot in to the side, where there is barely any room for us to squeeze into. The amount of men who have decided to join this meeting is surprising to say the least.

The warm Florida air swirls around us, and the amount of bodies present in the large room makes me sweat, as I feel the small beads of moisture begin to form around my cap.

The muttering of everyone talking echoes throughout the hall, with so many voices, the conversations are muddled and non-understandable, unless you are close by.

Mike, Dustin and Lucas, being the tallest of us, stand behind, where Will, Max and I stand in front of them, as we stand on our tip-toes to try to see what is going on.

"Order, order!", a booming voice crashes over the other sounds present in the room. A hush comes quickly through the crowded room.

The men in front of us now take their seats, and I set down from my toes, my back is pressed up against Mike's front, as I stand in front of him. If the situation was different, I would be thinking of ways to tease him, but my mind wants to hear the Captain's discussion.

The gruff looking Captain that called out stands in front of us, he wears a similar attire that Hopper wears, however instead of a blue coat, his is a deep red. He also has a long, scraggly black beard, and a tired sagging face.

The Captain clears his throat and looks out around us, "We're gathered today for our last discussion of attack on the monster's nest" he pauses, "And...Captain Hopper here says he has some sort of...news, for us, that he believes will assist in the attack", the Captain says gesturing about, as he moves to the side and let's Hopper take his place.

Hopper is put together much more effectively than the other Captain,

for he always likes a neat appearance, by all his men, him included. Hopper clears his throat to, as he looks between the podium in front of him, to the crowd that watches him eagerly. He seems tense.

"Uh, so, I've come about some information that would assist in our way of attack on the monster's island", Hopper starts, I see him scan the crowd, and his eyes settle on mine. I give him a small nod of encouragement, and he gives me one in return.

"Well, you see, I've come to recently learn about something that's on the island that we had not heard of before" he speaks loudly. "There is a queen monster that is able to summon smaller creatures, and...if we don't kill the queen, how will we defeat the monster's in general?" he asks to the crowd, who begin to mutter to the people beside them.

Hopper raises his hand to the crowd, "So, that means we need to change our plan of attack", he says a bit more quietly, and at this the crowd gets more anxious as the muttering grows.

"But, we've already've got the plan set!" a crew member yells from the back. "Yeah, and how'd he know if thar be a queen monster!" another cries out.

And now there are multiple men yelling out questions, and raising their arms in protest. I shake my head, as I feel my heart sink a bit, *this isn't going well*, passes through my head.

I must be showing my anxiousness because I feel Mike's breath on near my ear, as he reaches around to pull my hand behind me, as he gives it a squeeze, "It's okay" he whispers. I nod my head, still facing forward as I force myself to watch my breathing.

The Captain who was up before Hopper raises his hand and slaps it down three rough times against the pedestal in front of Hopper as he yells out, "Shuddap!" through the crowd, and the men settle once again.

Hopper gives the other man a slight tilt of his head as he looks back at the now agitated crowd of men. I watch Hopper let out a long breath, "Look, I got a tip off from a local, who had their own experience with the island, and they saw what the queen could do"

he admitted to the crowd.

I watch hesitantly as the crowd of men shake their heads in protest, not believing Hopper's story. "You's gonna trust a local broad?" another man shouts out, and Hopper holds out both hands, "Now hold on, it's a reputable source, they saw it with their own eyes, and they've been stuck here for almost five years because no one has dared venture back", he bellows.

The men are still looking hesitantly at Hopper, who is trying for all of his worth to convince the men of the truth he speaks. "We need to change our attack plan, so that we can be effective and take down the queen before it's too late!" he strains.

He looks out at the men, observing their movements. The other Captain places a hand on Hopper's shoulder. Hopper gives the man a leveled look, but then steps out of the way. The Captain opens his mouth to speak, "We've heard Captain Hopper's statement, now, I don't know who his source is, or if there is a queen, but we need to take a vote".

I feel myself trembling, waiting for the outcome of the situation, I unconsciously squeeze Mike's hand in a deathgrip, I hear his breath hitch behind me, "Sorry!", I turn and mutter to him, he shakes his head, "It's fine" he whispers back, and I turn my attention back to the crowd.

"All in favor of changing the battle tactics, raise your hand" the Captain barks throughout the sea of men, and it happens slowly, I watch as less than half of the men raise their hands, my eyes go wide.

"All those in favor of sticking with our original tactic?" he asks the crowd again, and this time hands fly up in sync, quickly outnumbering the other hands.

I let out a gasp, and feel my knees shake, I stumble back into Mike who catches me. He holds each of his hands on my shoulders to steady me. "Hey, it's okay El", he whispers to me soothingly, but by the warble in his voice, I can tell he's just as frightened as I am.

I try to steady myself, as I gaze about. "Then it's decided, the plan

stays the same" the Captain states as he gives Hopper a steady look. The men about let out a cheer as they raise to their feet. But, I feel stuck in our spot in the corner. My eyes turn to Hopper who still stands at the front of the crowd, his head is hung, as he runs a hand through his sweaty hair.

I can tell he feels defeated, but he soon moves and follows the rest of the men out of the stifling hall.

As the people inside begin to diminish, I turn towards Mike and bury my face into his chest, his hands immediately wrap around me as he tries to comfort me.

I feel the tears prick at the corners of my eyes, as I try to hold in my fear and tears, but I begin to cry into Mike's chest.

The rest of our small group gathers around us to make sure no looming eyes spot us easily. I take in the comfort of Mike's strong arms moving up and down my back in soothing motions as he tries to whisper comforting words into my ear.

After what feels like forever, I finally pull away and gaze at Mike's eyes with my red and watery ones. He offers me a gentle smile, as he reaches with his thumb to wipe away my remaining tears, "El, we'll figure it out, don't cry", he pleads.

His words sink into my cloudy head, and I realize that now is not the time to be feeling sorry for myself, I have to remember that my friends are just as nervous as I am, and we have to figure something out.

Mike takes his sleeve and wipes at my running nose, I give him a tentative laugh as I sniffle. I turn to face the rest of our group, and I take in their apprehension. I let out a long sigh, "We've got to talk to Hopper" I spit out quickly.

Their eyes lock on me instantly, "We already did that, El", Lucas shakes his head in defeat.

"No, now, we need to prepare ourselves", I say looking them over, "You saw. There were other Captain's, other men, who agreed with

us".

Our small group share nervous looks with one another, Will turns towards me, "It'd be mutiny, if we went against the rest of the group" he mutters, while the others nod in agreement.

"I know, but we've got to do something, or we're all facing certain death" I plead. I know they are scared and unsure, but Max speaks, "El's right, let's talk to Hopper again" she agrees and I give her a smile in thanks.

Mike places a hand on my shoulder, "I'm with you, El", I turn and give him a wide grin as well. Dustin sighs, "Well, I guess we'll have to talk to him" he surrenders, while Lucas and Will finally nod in agreement.

"We'll do it together" I nod to them, as I turn and make my way out of the hall, trying to spot Hopper with the rest of the group falling in turn.

I spot our Captain off to the side by the town hall. He's sitting on an old wooden bench, his hands moving up and down his head as he seems to be in deep concentration.

I approach Hopper cautiously, while the others stay back a bit. I place a gentle hand on his shoulder, he slowly moves his head up and his dark eyes meet mine. "Hey, Hopper" I greet him.

He lets out a long sigh and attempts a smile, "Hey, kid" he returns. A silence stretches between us before I take in a breath and speak to him, "Hopper, there were men who were will-" I start but he cuts me off, "I know kid, but it'd be mutiny if we went against the rest of the ships" he finishes my thought.

I turn to Will, who shrugs his shoulders. I look back to Hopper, who is looking straight ahead of him. I try again, "Hopper, you know what's going to happen if someone doesn't do *something*".

Hopper shakes his head, "Kid, you don't get it", he says while standing and facing our small group. "Taking on half of the King's

ships, and telling them they're wrong...that's a death sentence" he explains.

At this, I give him a hard stare, "You know it's the right thing to do" I challenge. He gives me a look back, we are locked in a staring contest. He huffs at me, "Obviously I know it's the right thing to do, but to mutiny the whole King's army...." he stops short, looking away.

Mike steps in, "You said you'd keep us safe, all of us" he gestures to our small groups. Hopper barely gives him a once over, "You kids, you don't get it, any of it".

"Yes we do!", Mike raises his voice, which startles me. "And we're not kids either, we're adults, just like the rest of you!" he challenges as he walks over to Hopper.

Now they're both staring at each other, and it takes me a moment to realize that Mike now meets Hopper at his level, barely standing a centimeter under him, their stares are level with one another.

"To me, you're just kids....and I can't protect you" he shakes his head, his voice braking, I can hear his defeat. "I failed you kids, and your little one's as well", knowing he is talking about Mike's and my shipsboys.

For once, I can see Hopper's more vulnerable side, and it intrigues me, so I take this chance. "Then make us safe, protect us" I work my way next to Mike.

Hopper flutters his eyes between each of ours. "Give us the future you promised" I stress, and at this I reach down and grasp Mike's hand, and we turn to meet each others eyes, a warm smile spreading on our faces.

After a moment I chance a look at Hopper, who is observing our interaction. I give him a pleading look, and he finally breaks as he lets out a very long breath as he looks to the ground and shakes his head, "This", he gestures between Mike and I, "Plan, that you're thinking of, that's what's going to get us killed" he grumbles, but I see the corner of his mouth rise a bit.

"I'll talk to the Captain's that I know would side with me, see if we can come up with something that can slip by the others" he shakes his head. Mike's hand squeezes mine tightly in excitement and I return the pressure.

"Thank you, truly, Hopper" I smile genuinely at him, he reaches out and rubs his hand over my cap, as he slides it down my face. I grumble at the action, but still smile at the large man, who is returning the same gesture.

After we meet with Hopper, our small group decides to find a small tavern, where we settle down for dinner. The silence stretches between us, our minds keeping our mouths silent for what they want to say.

Max breaks the silence, "What...what are you all planning, after this war with the monsters happens?" she asks quietly.

Her question settles around us, now, each of us thinking deeply on her question. But, Will speaks first, "I want to go home, I...I want to see if my mother is still alive", he says a bit solemnly as he stops eating and looks down.

Sitting beside him, I reach out my hand and place it on the one that is on top of the table, I give it a squeeze, he looks up at me, "We'll do it together, Will, we will find your mother" I encourage.

Will only nods and gives me a half smile, but returning to his meal. Lucas speaks next, "I'm staying with the crew, I've got nowhere else to be" he remarks, but then a devilish grin spreads out on his face, "But, who knows, maybe I'll meet a nice girl, and we'll settle down together..." he eludes, as his eyes not so suspiciously turn to Max, who is looking down at her plate, and doesn't respond to Lucas remark.

Dustin picks up on it immediately though, and voices his opinion loudly, "Yeah, well I'm going to move up in the Navy, and I'm going to become a Captain of my own ship!" he brags, we all look at him and roll our eyes at his boldness. He continues, "And I'll find the most beautiful girl in the world, and I'll make sure she's well taken care of, and we'll have lots of kids!" he exclaims, as he looks over to Max,

who *does* catch his look, and she huffs and rolls her eyes in annoyance.

Mike laughs at the curly haired boy and speaks, "Sorry Dustin, but I've already got the most beautiful girl in the world", he coos at me as he grips my hand and gives me his adorable look that melts my heart. I sigh at his words, and wish we were somewhere private so I could really show him what his words mean to me.

"Awe, Mike!" I exclaim, returning his loving look, as we stare at each other. Moans are shared around the table. "Ugh, you two are unbearable!" Dustin exaggerates, throwing his hands up over his head, while Lucas and Will nod in agreement. Max is chuckling at us, "Are you two always like this?" she asks.

A residual "Yes!" resounds from the boys, and we all can't help but laugh. "How did you two even get away with your relationship for so long, you're so obvious", Max questions.

I chuckle at this, "I think it's because you're a girl and pick up on things, I mean, Will knew, but Dustin and Lucas were oblivious".

"Yeah, that is until you two decided to make out in the stairwell to the storage room. You're lucky it was Lucas and I and not anyone else!" Dustin points an accusing finger at us.

Mike and I just roll our eyes and shake our head, "It still took you a year to find out" Mike counters.

"We, tried to be sneaky" I shrug my shoulders at Max. She lets out a laugh, "Guess you were getting a little sloppy?" she teases, as Mike and my faces turn red.

"Anyways, yeah, what about you two, what's going to happen?" Max questions, and now the rest of the eyes are on us.

We turn to look at each other, giving the other curious looks. "Uh, we, haven't really discussed it. I mean, we're going to get married the next time we make shore" Mike explains, but then Dustin is spitting his drink across the table, spraying us. "Dustin!" I exclaim, shaking my arms to rid them of his spit.

Lucas, Will and Max are staring at us with wide eyes. "You're getting married!?" Will asks surprised. It dawns on me then, that we never told the rest of our friends about our earrings, and our promise to one another.

My hand automatically raises to my left ear, where Mike's golden ring hangs, an eternal reminder to our promise to one another. I look at Mike with a hidden look, "Uh yeah, I guess we forgot to tell you-" I start but Dustin jumps in, "Forgot to tell us! That's an understatement!" he yells.

"Shut up, Dustin, you're being too loud!" Mike swats him as the boy calms himself a bit. I grip onto Mike's hand, "Yes, the day we got our earrings, we exchanged them, and Mike promised to marry me", I give him a dreamy look remembering the day like it was yesterday.

Will is looking the most bewildered, "You never thought to tell your own brother, about this?" he asks wildly. I shrug my shoulders, "I'm sorry Will, it was just a 'in the moment' thing I guess" I say sheepishly.

"Geez, next you're going to forgetting to tell me that your pregnant" he pokes. My face goes red and I know Mike's does so as well. "Shut up, Will!" I seethe, and now it's the groups turn to laugh at Mike and I.

"I bet it won't be long, especially after that little 'moment' they had a couple nights ago" Lucas says poking his elbow into Dustin's side, who chuckles as well.

"Yeah, we *all* know what happened that night, right Mike?" he teases the boy beside me, who's trying to look anywhere but at our friends faces.

"Ugh, you guys are awful" he mutters as he buries his face into his hands, I reach out and rub his shoulders in comfort.

"We told you, *nothing* happened" I stressed. "Uh, huh, sure El" Lucas pokes at me, and I shake my head at their childness.

"Wait. What happened a couple nights ago?" Max is now asking our

table, her hands spread out in front of her, looking between each of us.

"Oh, you know, Mike and El went off, for the night, and spent it together somewhere", Dustin wiggles his eyebrows at us and we sigh in frustration.

"Seriously?!" Max turns to look at us. I let out an exasperated sigh, "Yes, we spent the night together but-" and Lucas cuts me off, "Ha, ha, see! They totally did it!" he points a finger at us.

"Oh my god Lucas, I told you we didn't!" Mike hisses at his male cohort. "Wow, you two are so red right now", Max teases us. Mike and I turn to look at each other, and admire our red faces, we give each other a smile.

"Well, whatever guys, at least I'm getting *something*" Mike throws back to them, not realizing how insinuating his words are. "Mike!" I say embarrassedly. He turns to look at me, takes a second, then realizes his words, "Wait, wait no-" he tries, but the boys and Max are now in tears laughing.

"You two are so obvious!" Lucas chuckles through tears. "Yeah, what else are you two getting up to?" Dustin asks, as he bends over chuckling.

Mike and I just look at each other and defeat and sigh, knowing that at least our friends are having a good time and that our resounding fight with the monsters is pushed back into our minds.

We are able to have a moment as friends where we can laugh and share stories without the looming threat hanging over us.

Ugh, I'm so sorry I took so long again! This chapter was really hard for me to write, I have been working on it everyday and I don't particularly care for it. But, I had to get some info into it and then make up for the boringness of it with throwing some fun in as well. Now, I'm passed it though and can move on to what I want to get at.

Thank you again for your wonderful reviews and for those who

have been patiently waiting! I will hopefully have another chapter up soon! Got a busy weekend ahead, my niece has a basketball tournament and today is my birthday so we are celebrating this weekend! It will be nice to get a break from work and have some fun as well! And I hope you all have a wonderful weekend!

Thanks again for reading! And as always PLEASE REVIEW! I loooooove hearing from you all!

24. Mutiny

Blargh! I'm so sorry my updates are taking forever! I've been so busy and the weather has been so beautiful that we've been doing a lot outside and it's hard to be inside writing when our weather has been so cruddy lately!

Also, huge shout out to all of my lovely reviewers, I can't say it enough with how amazing you all are, and so thoughtful as well! Thank you for all the birthday wishes, it really made my day! And I'm glad you all enjoyed the last chapter as well, when I felt I was just rambling, I hope you enjoy this next one just as much! Thanks again!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack.

El's Point of View:

We eventually made it back to the ship in the dead of night. Although, Mike and Will ended up having to drag Dustin and Lucas back due to their drunken stupor from the night of heavy drinking they pursued in.

Mike and Will determinedly lifted both boys into their now shared hammock, which, to Max and I was a hysterical sight as Dustin and Lucas were no help at all as they stumbled about and were dead weight in both struggling boys arms.

After about five minutes of struggling both Will and Mike gave up on their endeavor and dropped the other two boys to the ground, in which they did not seem to mind as they curled up and passed out to sleep.

We all stood about and shook our heads at the sight. With a bit more practice Max and Will steadied themselves into their hammock, as Mike and I slid into ours with practiced ease.

However, just as I went to step into my side, Mike reaches out his hand to stop me, I give him a look, "What?" I ask in a whisper.

It's dark in our quarters but the light of the full moon shines through, and I can see that Mike's cheeks are painted red.

"I..uh" he stutters, not making sense, I shake my head at him, "Mike what is it?", I ask.

He tries again, "Well...no one else is here, and won't be till tomorrow evening, why can't you...sleep, I mean, our heads together?" he asks a bit confusingly.

It takes me a second to figure out the meaning behind his statement, but then it dawns on me, "You mean, sleep the same way?" I question.

Mike ducks his head, and his shaggy black hair hangs about him, "Uh, yeah" he confirms, as he casts a careful look back to me.

I can't help but let my mouth turn into a wide grin, instead of answering him, I place my foot a little differently than usual, and instead of casting my feet towards Mike's head, I reverse myself, and begin to push my feet towards his, as I place a careful hand on his chest.

I watch Mike's reaction, as his eyes widen, as I trail my hand up his chest as I lay down beside him.

Mike mimics my movements as he settles down beside me. We turn our heads so they are facing one another, our eyes scanning the others faces in the darkness that surrounds us.

Mike reaches up his left hand and places it over my hand that lies on his chest, he threads our fingers together effortlessly, and he sighs in contentment. He reaches forward and places a gentle kiss on my forehead, and then we are nuzzling our heads together.

"I can't wait, for this to be every night", he coos as he pulls us closer together. I give him a breath of a smile, "I know, it will be perfect".

We lay there snuggled up to one another as Dustin's obnoxious, drunken snores begin to fill the space around us.

Mike and I chuckle, as I play with his shirt collar, I can feel his eyes

on me, watching my movements. I open my mouth to speak, but hesitate, leaving it hanging open for a moment, when I finally speak the words that have been playing around in my head all night.

"Mike?" I whisper, he gives me a small noise in return. "What...what *are* we planning on doing, after all of this is over?" I bring my eyes up to meet his.

He studies me intently, faintly, I can see him furrowing his eyebrows, "What do you mean?" he asks.

I continue to play with his collar as I mull over the words I want to say, "I mean...what are we going to do?"

Mike pulls me closer still, "I'm going to marry you", he states as plain as day. I roll my eyes, "Mike, I know that, but I mean after, after", I look up into his gleaming eyes.

He lets out a long breath, "I'll get a job somewhere, we'll buy or build a house, and..." he falters, unsure as to where he is going, I give him a smug look, "See, we don't know what's going to happen after all of this is over, and....I'm scared" I admit looking down.

I feel a small chuckle in Mike's chest, "El, that's nothing to worry about now" he soothes. "As long as we're together, that's all I care about" he finishes earnestly, as he pulls my chin up to look me in the eyes.

Our eyes flitter between the others, he can tell I'm still not convinced, "El, I promise, with all my heart, that, no matter what, everything will be okay".

I can tell he's trying really hard to convince me, and thankfully it is. The way his eyes scan my face, to try to rid the worry that I'm sure shows as plain as day.

Finally, I feel myself start to relax at his words, at his earnesty. The boy who has shown me so much love, compassion and truth, and the way he speaks honestly through his words, I should know better than to worry.

I let my mouth turn upwards, letting my teeth show, in which Mike

mimics in return. "That's the El smile I love" he rubs our noses together.

I giggle at his affection, "Mike, I love you" I whisper to him, as I look at him deeply, he only continues to smile, "You promise?" he teases. I bring my face closer to his, "Promise", I respond as I bring our mouths together.

It's not rushed or full of lust as our usual kisses have been, instead this kiss is filled with a different meaning. We move our mouths in a dance that only we know, slow, gentle and only ours.

I feel Mike's emotion pour gently from him, his love, devotion and caringness that he has shown from day one resonates to me. And I desperately try to return my true feelings back to him, so, that he too knows just how much he means to me.

We slowly break apart from our kiss, and we breathe in the others warm air. Mike places another kiss on my cheek, as he pulls me into his warm embrace. "As long as I'm here, our future will never be in doubt".

And at his words, I can feel my heart grow, and tears pricking at the back of my eyes, knowing just how much he truly loves me. We fall asleep in each other's arms, knowing that someday soon, we will be able to do so without fear of discovery.

We awake the next morning to moaning and groaning coming from the floor. "Ugh...what happened last night?" I hear the low moan from Lucas.

"I feel like I've been hit by a cart", Dustin grumbles.

I stir at their obnoxious voices, and I sense Mike's movement next to me. He stretches his long arm above us as he lets out a long yawn. He quickly puts his arm across my body and pulls me in tightly, "Good morning, beautiful" he says with his thick morning voice, and I melt into his embrace.

"Good morning" I answer back, as I place a swift kiss to his

unsuspecting lips. His tiredness makes his reaction slow, and I chuckle at his still puckered lips as he drifts off to a light slumber.

I snuggle back into him momentarily and relish in his warm presence, I begin to feel myself drift off, when suddenly our hammock begins to rock violently.

Mike and I are both wide awake now as we shoot up, "Rise and shine, lovebirds!" I hear Max's voice from one side of the hammock.

"Yeah, no time to sleep in!" comes Will's voice from the other side, as they rock our hammock back and forth, waiting for us to rise.

"Okay, okay, we're up!" Mike grumbles, as we hold onto the sides of the hammock. Will and Max have stopped their shaking and now they are laughing.

"Will you guys shut up, you're so loud!" Dustin moans as he holds his head.

"It's not our fault you and Lucas decided to drink your weight in ale last night" Will shoots back to him.

Dustin sticks his tongue out at the smallest boy, who returns the gesture.

Mike and I clamber out of our hammock and give them a dirty look. "Jerks", I whisper, as I stretch and yawn.

"You guys had been sleeping long enough, besides, the other men are coming aboard, I'm sure they wouldn't like to see you in the state you two were just in", Max teases.

We roll our eyes at the red headed girl, but thank her nonetheless for keeping a look out for us. Mike tucks our hammock away, as we make our way to the top deck.

Just as Max had said, the crew of the *Hawk* have steadily made their way back onto the ship. I take in their appearances, many seem fairly tired, or hungover. Some are in high spirits and infectious moods.

We're just about to head down the gangplank when we run into

Jonathan who is steadying a slumped over Steve.

"What happened to him?" Will asks the older boy. Jonathan looks up at us, his face strained from holding up Steve, "Ah, you know, drunken night" he shrugs his shoulder.

Will rushes over to the gangplank and lifts Steve up by his other shoulder, "I'll help you get him to his quarters" Will offers.

Jonathan gives him a thankful look, "Thanks Will, that would be much appreciated", he says as they both lift the semi-unconscious guy to his drunken feet.

"W-Wwher-we", Steve stutters as his head swings from side to side. Jonathan chuckles, "Don't worry Steve, were back on the ship".

"S-S-SShh" Steve tries, but his head hangs painfully, as he passes between consciousness and unconsciousness.

"I'll catch up with you guys in a bit" Will motions towards us, and we all nod our heads, as he and Jonathan stumble, carrying Steve to the Midshipman's quarters.

"Guess he can't hold his drink", Lucas comments, but he is met with a swift slap to his arm from Max, "That's what we had to do with your sorry ass last night!", she growls at him.

Lucas backs off as the rest of us chuckle at his mirth. We all finally make it down the gangplank and onto the shores. There seems to be a lot less activity as the men have begun to return to their respected ships to prepare to set sail.

"Where do you think he'd be?" Mike asks me. I turn my head in all directions, surveying the landscape and thinking desperately where Hopper would hold his secret meeting, *if he even planned one*, I think to myself.

Our ragtag group moises through the streets for quite awhile, each of us checking hotels and bars for any sign of Hopper, but none come to pass.

"Where could he be?" Dustin asks aloud to no one in particular. I let

out a frustrated breath, and shrug my shoulders, "I don't know", I say gruffly, "For all we know he's back on the ship", I finish frustratedly.

My mind begins to berate Hopper immensely, thinking on how he went back on his word, how he didn't fulfill his promise to protect us, *what a joke*, I think to myself.

Frustrated I let out a growl, "Whatever, obviously he went back on his word, we should get prepared ourselves" I say defeated.

Max and the boys give me a cautious look, and Mike is the first to speak, "El, Hopper wouldn't go back on his word to us".

I give Mike a steady look, "Obviously he would, or else we would have found him by now" I state hotly.

Mike gives me a leveled look, but then one of sincerity, and I drop my guard a book, I sigh, "I'm sorry, it's just frustrating" I admit.

Mike walks over to me and places a steady hand on my shoulder, giving me the reminder I need to know that he's by my side, and so is the rest of our small group.

I give him a shy smile, which he returns, "El, we'll find him we ju-" he tries but then a small voice is crying out, "El!"

I turn my head in the direction in which my name came from, and there, I see young Finny, and his small crew, running through the dusty streets of Florida. I watch them run clumsily, as trails of dust clouds follow them.

They finally catch up to us, and they are breathing heavily, Finny bends over and places his hands on his knees. "Finny, what's wrong?" I ask the black haired boy.

Finny straightens up, still breathing hard, but speaks, "It's...Hopper...he wanted...us to find...you", he breathes.

My eyes go wide as they move to look at the rest of our group, I can see their expression matches mine. I turn back to Finny, "Where is he?" I ask more determined now.

His breathing calmed a bit, Finny motions a following motion with his arm, "Come on, and we'll show you", he says as he turns to his group, and they are off again.

I don't hesitate as I take off after the younger boys. I can hear the rest of our group trailing behind as well, their foot falls being heard behind my back.

The young boys are moving steadily as their smaller legs carry them, their arms pumping back and forth to keep their momentum.

The rest of us move a bit quicker behind them, our legs longer and stronger, however, I find myself mildly impressed by their speed.

We follow the group of boys for quite awhile, I've got a knot in my side, and my chest is heaving trying to keep the air circulating in and out of my lungs.

I turn my head slightly behind me, I can see out of the corner of my eyes that Mike is practically next to me, along with Max and Lucas. I strain my neck a bit more and see that Will and Dustin are lagging a bit, but still keeping pace.

I move my head back forward as my eyes stay trained on the younger boys, not wanting to lose them.

After many twists and turns through the streets, the young boys finally start to slow down to a steady jog, when they finally come to rest in front of an old white church.

Our group settles down, coming to a stop as the younger boys did. My chest is burning from the exertion of energy, and I allow myself to take in deep gulps of air, trying to soothe my lungs.

Mike and Max do the same next to me, their faces red from exertion. Lucas seems a bit more put together, standing with his hands on his hips as he calmly takes in breaths.

Will and Dustin came to a slower movement way before the boys stopped and now they are walking up to us, their breathing labored.

"What...the...hell" Dustin breathes as he falls to his butt on the now

cobblestoned ground. He splays his arms out around him, we watch his chest rise and fall quickly. "That....sucked" he exhales.

I shake my head at him, as my breathing finally slows, I turn to Finny, "Why are we here?" I ask him.

Finny turns to me, "This is where they are", he states matter of factly as he gestures to the very old, and run down church.

I survey the building carefully, its placed deep in a back alley that is dark and looming. I can't help but think of who would want to worship here. But as I move closer to the building I can see a cockeyed sign hanging on the door it reads: Church of Saint Peter, established 1748. The words are barely readable, and the paint is scratched and decrepit.

Thinking of how it is placed in a hodgepodge of buildings and the decrepitated state of the building, I can only guess why Hopper chose this place for a meeting.

"Is they 'Hopper'?" I question the young boy, who nods his head. "Yeah, there's a whole lot of them in there" young Lenny jumps in behind the boy.

I raise my eyebrow at their small gang, but even Benjy and Murray are nodding their heads in agreement.

I let out a long breath and turn towards my own group, but I find they are watching me, waiting for my move so they can follow.

Mike answers my unspoken question, "It'll be okay, El, we can trust the boys", he says throwing the young ones a wink, and they smile in return.

I feel my mouth move into a grin, knowing Mike always seems to have an answer for my uncertainty. Not that I don't trust the boys, I just know them to get up to no good when they want attention. However, this time seems different.

"Okay boys", I sigh, "Show us the way" I tell them as I gesture towards the church.

Finny eagerly leads the way as he climbs the crumbling steps to the rickety building. My group follows somewhat tenderly behind the young boys, our heads move about, surveying the building for any hidden object around us.

The door lets out a loud screech as Finny pulls at the lopsided and rusty hinges. He pulls it open with ease as he slinks inside, we all follow.

Entering the church there is a smell of mildew and mold. Our noses scrunch at the unpleasant odor. "Come on, this way" Benjy motions us to follow. It can be seen that mass hasn't been held here for a *very* long time. The pews are either overturned or broken, the main hall is littered in a foot of dust and cobwebs. And many of the once beautiful stained glass windows are smashed or covered in dust.

There's barely any light to lead us, but the small boys know the way as we step over the pews and up to the pastor's podium, which surprisingly, is still standing.

The boys lead us to the back, where there is another door, Murray opens it, and heads down the stairs, the younger boys following in lead.

"Ugh, guys, I don't like the feeling of this", Dustin voices as we get closer to the door. Lucas lets out a frustrated breath, "Don't be such a baby" Lucas complains.

"I'm not being a baby...just...reasonable" Dustin argues back. I roll my eyes as I feel another argument is brewing.

"Just shut up, both of you!" Max retaliates, I give her a grateful smile, thankful to have another person in the group to tell those two to stop their bickering.

I gingerly approach the door and look into the darkness, from the little light, I can see that there is a small set of rickety stairs that lead downwards, into a pit of darkness.

I shudder a little at the sight, but I feel Mike's hand on my shoulder and feel somewhat braver. I take a breath and disappear into the

blackness, as I venture down the stairs, the others following in turn.

Reaching my hands out to guide me, I try to let my eyes adjust to the harsh blackness surrounding us. Moving down the steps they creak and groan as our weights bare on them.

As we journey down the steps, I feel my hands brush against a hard wooden surface, knowing we reached the bottom, which is just as dark and looming.

"What took you so long?" I jump at Finny's voice who I can just barely make out his shape in the darkness.

"Don't, do that" I say to him through gritted teeth. He only shrugs but takes my hand in his. "Tell everyone to grab ahold, it's pretty dark through here" Finny explains.

"Gee, you don't say!" I hear Dustin's harsh whisper behind me, but we follow Finny's instructions and grab ahold of each other's hands as he pulls us into the darkness.

We weave our way into the room below, small windows on the side barely illuminating the space around us.

"Shit!" I hear from Dustin, who groans. "What is it now?" I hear Max grumble. "I stubbed my foot on something, that's what!" he bites back.

Finally, Finny comes to a stop in front of another door, "Okay, it's in here", he explains. I furrow my eyebrows and open my mouth to say something to him, but upon opening the door we are finally met with a dim light.

Finny tugs on me to follow, in which I return to Mike's hand and so on with our small train.

I can hear muffled voices entering the room, and my eyes go wide at the sight before us.

We pile in behind Finny and flitter through the door, I watch as the rest of our group mimic my reaction, as their eyes go wide as well.

We are met with about forty eyes on us, and the room goes silent with our entrance. I scan the room cautiously and finally they land on our man in question, Hopper.

He's giving us a wide, toothy grin, "See you finally made it" he quips, and our mouths drop in surprise.

"Hopper", I breath looking at him. Still smiling he stands to welcome us into the churches darker breadths.

"How?" I try but he chuckles, "You told me to start a mutiny, so I did" he approaches me and places a delicate hand on my shoulder, I stare at him in wonder.

Our eyes study each other for a moment, "I told ya kid, I wouldn't let anything happen to you in this fight, and I always follow through with my promises" he nods his head.

I can feel my heart beating a bit wilder now as the adrenaline pumps wildly through my veins. *He actually came through with it*, I think to myself, and I feel my own mouth turn into a grin as well.

Hopper leads me and the rest of the group to stand among the rest of the men who are occupying the space.

I look at the faces around me, and take notice that they are Captain's and seaman of the other King's ships. "Okay Hopper, the kids you were talking about are here, now why'don we get on wit' it then" a large man with a curly red beard speaks.

"Yes, yes, you've all been patient, and I can't thank you for coming and hearing me, and the kids out" he gestures to us ships boys.

Eyes are on us once again, I can feel Max and the rest of the boys straighten beside me, never once being put at the center of attention.

"Kid" he points to Max, whose eyes go wide, "Why don't you tell the rest of these fine gentleman, the little story you told me", he asks.

I turn my head to look at the girl beside me, her blue eyes are wide with uncertainty, and I can tell she's nervous as she opens and closes her mouth to speak, but nothing comes out.

"Uhm, I..." she tries, but she is shaking at the amount of eyes that are on her. I reach for her with my hand, and squeeze her shoulder. She turns her bright eyes towards me, I give her a reassuring nod and smile, "It's okay, Max" I attempt to soothe her.

Her eyes ponder for a bit, but then soften, her shoulders relax, as she takes in a deep shaky breath as she turns towards the other men, "I was born in Ireland" she begins, and she soon recounts her story to the men once more.

Max retells her story to the men, who sit silently at her tale, taking in each of her words. "And, now, I've been here, for almost five years, waiting to return home", she finishes bowing her head, and I know she's trying to hold off her tears.

Dustin reaches for her shoulder behind her and he gives it a reassuring squeeze. Max whips her head around and gives him a small smile in thanks.

I survey the room, and the men, being the salty seamen they are, their faces show little to no reaction to Max's story, my heart begins to beat hard against my ribs once again. *Did they believe her?* Crosses my mind.

I look at Mike, who catches my eyes, and I can tell he's worried too. I break my eye contact with him, and meet Hopper's who shrugs his shoulders in uncertainty.

The room stays silent for awhile, the light of the few lit candles flicker idly. When a voice finally breaks the pregnant silence.

"Captain Mayfield?" the man's voice is deep and crackly. We all whip our heads to the owner of the voice, and it belongs to a dark haired man, with a bushy mustache upon his weathered face.

"Yessir" Max's voice quivers. The man bows his head and gives it a short nod, "Hmph" he says, not rising his head.

"Knew Captain Mayfield, he was a good man" he crackly voice echoes through the dim room. I watch as Max's eyes go wide once again.

"Y-Y-You did?" Max asks, the man nods his head, "Yep, sure did, we did some trading here and there, haven't seen him for many years....now I know why", the man lifts his head and gives Max a leveled look.

"Didn't know he had an older son though" he questions, and I feel my heart plummet into my stomach, as I'm sure Max's does the same.

Max opens her mouth to speak, but the man beats her to it, "Anyways, any kid of Mayfield's, got to believe" he nods his head as he turns towards the other men, who are now looking at him.

"Hopper's right, we've got to have a plan, one that's gonna' work" he states as he begins to wander around the room.

Hopper stands as well, "Anyone opposed to a mutiny?" he asks the men.

The rest of the men in the room look at each other, still mulling over Max's story in their heads, but soon, a light colored hair man stands and says, "Aye".

My heart begins to rise from my stomach, as we all watch in stunned awe, as each and every men in the room begins to rise, as they all say, "Aye".

I can feel my eyes swimming with tears, knowing that a little more than half of the King's fleet is in agreement, the old plan is out, and a new plan is in.

Hopper is grinning wildly now, "Now this...this is the King's Captain's and seaman" he bellows to the men, "Instead of following some Navy brat, who knows nothing about the threats these monster's hold...we will take lead, and finally finish these beasts!" he yells pumping his fist into the air, as the rest of the men yell out and cheer as well.

"Now, let's kill this queen and end this war!" He cries out, and soon my voice and the others join in as well. Our hearts finally filled with hope.

It's been two days since the meeting for the foreshadowing mutiny,

and we all can't help but feel a bit joyful at the plan that has been set forth. Our survival of this war seems on the higher scale, and we are each feeling thankful for Hopper.

We are back on the *Hawk* and so is the rest of the crew. We've helped the other seaman load food, drink, and weapons onto the ship, so that we are prepared for the battle.

Once everything is set and stationed, we spend the last night at land together, on top of the steep hill that overlooks the town.

We have each splurged a good chunk of our earnings, knowing that it will be awhile till we come back to land, and furthermore, we know a handsome reward to vanquishing the queen and her monster of island will fetch us a decent pay day.

We have grouped together a large mass of breads, meats and exotic fruits, that we have laid upon the blanket I had purchased for Mike and I.

Will had managed to procure a couple of cheeses, while Dustin and Lucas bought us two bottles of a sweet wine.

We all sit together munching on our dinner, and sipping at the bottles of wine, as we laugh and let ourselves revel in a moment of peace and comfort.

Max is doubled over as we recount to her our many stories of us growing up on the ship. And many of the stories tend to involve Dustin and his unfortunate mishaps.

Will and Lucas are animatedly describing the first time he back talked a sailor within our first couple of months on the ship, in which the said sailor was not to happy about.

"And then..." Lucas laughs as he tries to retell the story, "The seaman came up to him and asked if he wanted a keelhauling, and Dustin's face went white, and he started to cry in front of everyone!" Lucas bowed over trying to contain his laughter.

Dustin is the only one not laughing, as he sits with his arms crossed and lips tight against his face. "Asshole" he murmurs shaking his head

back and forth.

Max continues to laugh, but she places a hand on Dustin's shoulder, "Oh, don't you worry Dustin, it's kind of a cute story, especially since you were so young", she says sympathetically, as Dustin's eyes light up.

"R-RReally?" she sputters at her words. Max nods her head, "Yeah, of course".

I watch as I'm pretty sure Dustin melts into a pool of gratitude before us, I chuckle at the interaction, as I see Lucas narrow his eyes at them.

Mike sits behind me as I lay my back against his chest, staying still, I can feel his rhythmic heart beating against my back, and it soothes me.

The sun begins to set as it casts an orangey glow against the waters. I marvel at the sight, "Wow, it's beautiful", I comment to myself more than anything, but I feel Mike's breath against my ear, "But, it's not as beautiful as you" he whispers for only me to hear as he places a gentle kiss against the side of my head.

I revel at his words as I turn into his embrace, as we stare at each other lovingly, forgetting anyone else is near.

"Ugh, their making *those* eyes at each other, come on guys, let's get out of here before we see something we don't want to" Dustin voice breaks us from our reverie, and we both turn towards our group, who are beginning to stand and stretch.

I shake my head at them and raise my hand for them to stop, "No, guys come on, it's our last night-" I try but I'm cut off by Will, "And that's exactly why I'm sure you guys want some time *alone*" he coos at us.

My face flares at his words as Dustin, Lucas and Max are chuckling at Will's words as they grab their stuff, "Guys" Mike chides, but Max speaks, "Don't worry guys, we get it, have this moment for a bit" she casts me a wink.

Knowing there's no sense arguing, Mike and I shut our mouths as the others pack up. They move to leave. Will raises a hand in goodbye, and the others follow his motion, "See you guys later, or not!" he yells playfully.

And now Lucas turns to us yelling, "Don't do anything stupid, like...get El pregnant!" he turns and laughs in which the other follow turn.

I'm sure mine and Mike's faces are about fifty different shades of red by now, but there's no use worrying now that everyone has gone.

And in that moment of realization, I feel Mike's arms wrap around me, as he falls back quickly, pulling me to his chest. I let out a squeal in surprise, "Mike!" I yell playfully, but he pulls me tight to him.

He's laying on his back and I push myself up to get a good look at him, he's smiling widely, "What, they said to take advantage of this moment, so I am" he wriggles his eyebrows at me, and I swat his chest for his cheekiness.

"You're something else, Wheeler" I roll my eyes at him, but he only laughs harder as he tugs at me so our faces are only a breath away.

We stare into each other's dark eyes. "I'm definitely going to take this moment, where it's just you and me" he whispers huskily to me, and I can't help but melt into him.

Instead of answering, I swoop my head down and our lips find each other. Instead of the small chaste kisses, it quickly turns heated as I slip my tongue into his mouth and he eagerly joins in.

I can feel his hands trailing up and down my back, as he coolly slips a hand under my shirt and vest, as he caresses my bare back.

I can't help but moan in contentment, loving the feeling of his skin on mine. He rolls over, and now he is on top as he steadies his weight over mine.

We move against each other like a dance we have practiced so many times before. I can feel his excitement against me, and I can't help but buck my hips into his, in which elicits a growl from him. He swoops

down and bites at my neck. "You know, that doesn't help with me not doing what Lucas said, not to do", he growls.

I chuckle against him, "Well, same goes for you" I say reaching down in between us and grabbing him, which he lets out a low growl, "Ugh, but I can't help that, especially with a beautiful girl like you beneath me" he says as he looks at me with heated eyes.

I hood my eyes as I match his intensity, challenging him. And soon, our mouths are pressed against each others in a heated battle for dominance, as our limbs tangle beneath us.

We bask in this moment alone, and fill each other with as much love and passion we can omit to the other as the sky above us lights up with the stars above.

Ahhhhh! Again, I am so sorry for the long update! Time has been non-existent for the last couple of weeks! I live in a place where the snow just melted about 3 weeks ago and then we got a ton of rain, and now we are being blessed with warmth and sunshine, and we can't let it escape us with all we need to do around our home!

So, I thank you all SOOOOO MUCH, for your unbelievable patience! I haven't even had time to read and catch up on fanfiction since then either!

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, tried to throw in some good Mileven as well!

As always let me know what you think and please review! You are all awesome!

25. Heart to Heart

Hello! And thank you all for the wonderful reviews! I love the questions you all ask, but sometimes I do hesitate to answer them because I do have a plot line in my head and where this story will finish up and how. So please stay tuned! And I'm glad you all enjoyed the last chapter as well!

Okay, so on with the story...

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of View:

Mike and I spend the early part of the night tangled together in our own blissful innocence, as we talk about our future as well as sharing the moment to have our mouths and bodies pressed firmly against one another.

I've found that having Mike's body pressed against mine is one of the greatest feelings in the world, and I marvel in the glory of it.

After spending a while catching our breaths and diving back in for more of each other, we finally decide it's time to head back to the ship, especially since we will be departing in the early afternoon.

We both stand and straighten out our clothes and hair, as we pack up my small blanket and tuck it away into my sea bag.

"Okay, I think we're all set" I say bent over, tying my seabag closed. I stand back up and find Mike giving me a heartfelt look. My eyes soften, "What?" I murmur quietly.

He simmers up to me slowly and takes my hands in his, he's giving me a tender smile, "Nothing, just marveling at you, and getting all my loving looks in while I can" he confesses.

I shy my head away, and peer up to him with my dark eyes. I find that as we have grown, he has gotten much taller in our adult years, and I have to crane my neck quite a bit to reach his gaze.

But, Mike is always sweet and compromising, so he bends down gently and I stand on my tiptoes, as our lips meet in a tender embrace.

Mike tugs at my hands and wraps his arms quickly around my back, my hands jump to his chest, as he holds me close.

The kiss is enticing, and pulls me to him even more so. It's so easy to get swept up in these moments, I've found.

We finally break, and we both rest our foreheads against one another. Mike rubs his hands gingerly up and down my back, he sighs, "I just wish..." he says quietly, while I attempt to look up at him through our entangled hair, as our foreheads are still pressed together.

I wait for him to continue, as we hold onto one another. When he finally takes in a deep breath, "I just wish we could be normal....where we don't have to hide this" he states.

I match his sigh, "I know, I do too, but after this war is over, then we can, in England" I remind him.

Mike nods his head against mine, but pulls away to stare me in the eyes, "It just makes it so hard, that, I can't show my love for you".

I give him a shy smile, "It's the same for me too, Mike".

He breathes through his nose, and then moves to give me a long sweet kiss on my head, I shut my eyes at the contact, and feel the intensity of the meaning behind the kiss, and I hold onto it tightly.

Mike pulls me into another tight hug, as we both rest our heads on the others shoulders, embracing this last moment we have together until after the battle.

We pull away slowly from one another, and we give the other a matching, heartwarming smile.

"I love you, El" Mike whispers sweetly, "I love you too, Mike" I return to him, as we give in to one last long and tender kiss, before pulling away, as we lace our fingers together and make our way through the dark street, hand in hand.

Morning comes too soon, Mike and I had made it back to the ship later than expected, but we both know it was well worth it.

The four morning bells ring out across the vast ocean, and it stirs us from our slumber. I hear the moans and groans from the others around us, as we stretch, and yawn and get ready for the day.

Although it is early, the ship is filled with organized movement, as no man stays asleep, preparing for the departure.

We pack away our hammocks and we make our way up to the upper deck, as we join in with the movement.

Mike and I meet up with our young ships boys as we corale them and give them small duties to help with the departure.

Murray and Benjy groan at the manual labor they are forced into, carrying gunpowder to assigned guns, and of course it's a warm, sunny day, so the sweat pours from their tedious work.

Finny and Lenny are helping me restock the cutlasses in their rightful holsters that line the ship. Hopper had a mass of holders be put in by the carpenter as we stayed buoyed on land, allowing for more holdings for the newer cutlasses to be held.

The young boys are chatting aimlessly, about typical boy stuff, nothing that peaks my interest. So, I allow my mind to wander, and I cast my eyes out to the enchanting blue sea.

I can't help but feel somewhat vengeful towards the gorgeous blue waves, and the bright yellow sun, as it casts a warmth around us. It's almost an ominous feeling, the joy of the moment, but of the looming threat that threatens us.

My stomach turns at the thought as it fills with apprehension. Until now, I've been okay and have kept my nerves about me. For, anytime the battle has been brought up, I tend to keep my mind on something else, or move away from the discussion.

But now, now it's here, and I can't help but think about what is to come, and what may happen. My mind drifts to the moment that

brought us here, and I close my eyes as I think back to that day, that happened what seems like a lifetime ago.

My brain allows for the noise, the screaming, the pleading of life. The dark night brought alive by burning houses and roaring flames. Of Joyce telling us to flee for our lives. And I see the dark figure of the monster bounding towards Will and I, ready to shred us to pieces without a second thought.

My eyes open quickly, and I feel my heart hammering against my chest, and I find myself breathing in and out quicker than usual.

"El?" a small voice brings me out of my thoughts, and I whip my head to the owner of the voice. I try to gather myself together, "Yes?" I breath out shakily, looking at the curious eyes of Finny and Lenny.

"Are...you okay?" Finny asks hesitantly. I guess in my moment of thought, I went a little to far, and I can tell my body is rigid and I'm shaking.

I open my mouth to speak, but I'm hesitating, *am I okay?* Dances across my mind quickly. But, then I look at the small boys in front of me, and I can tell that by me not answering, they are growing more concerned as well, and I don't want them to see that I'm nervous, because I refuse to let them feel frightened as well.

I shake my head quickly, and give them a wide, trying smile, "Yeah, yeah, of course I'm okay, just something crossed my mind, and I got...distracted is all" I chuckle at them, throwing them a hand of un-worriedness.

They are still eyeing me cautiously, taking in my revere and I hope they don't seem past my facade. But, after a moment, I see them settle and they nod their heads in acceptance.

I let myself settle as my shoulders relax, letting out a sigh of relief. Lenny turns towards me, "We're done with the cutlasses, what's next?" he asks while wiping the sweat on his brow.

I smile at the young boys, I rub both of their heads affectionately, "You've done good work today boys, why don't you go grab some

lunch and cool down a bit?" I suggest.

They pull back and give me wide grins, and soon they are off to the mess hall, Finny turns back waving, "Thanks, El!" he calls back, and I merely give a small wave in return, watching their backs head towards the front of the ship.

As they disappear, I allow for my thoughts to wander a bit. I gaze back out towards the sea, and I feel the unsettledness grow deep within my stomach.

I desperately try to break my thoughts away from the doom and gloom that has decided to cloud my mind, but I can't help the dread sink in, as my mind unhelpfully comes up with numerous ways for how this can all go wrong. I let out a frustrated sigh and decide to go find someone to talk to.

The early morning stretches on quickly, and I'm desperately searching for someone to talk to, especially since my damn mind won't let my dark thoughts just move past me.

The ship is busy and bustling, as the men are working as quick as possible, attempting to get the ship settled and ready for departure.

I try to seek out Mike, but, he was pulled away from the young boys and I to assist with carrying larger loads onto the ship, so I know he is busy. My next thought comes to Will or even Max, but I can't find them anywhere.

The heat begins to build within me, and I feel the panic as well. The amount of men moving and weaving about becomes overwhelming to my already disheveled mindset.

Now, I begin to feel the real alarm begin to go off in my brain, and with everything else going on in my raging mind, my breathing starts to quicken, and the sweat begins to bead about my forehead.

My heart is hammering against my ribcage, and I'm becoming disoriented as I turn my head quickly about, seriously trying to find *someone*.

Now, I'm hyperventilating and I hold my hands to my chest as it's like something is gripping onto it tightly, and I can't breath and....now tears are starting to come down my face...and I just can't!

I want to turn and run and get away from everything but my body is frozen in fear and panic, and I can't do anything.

Just as I'm about to let loose and let myself curl into a ball, I feel a gruff hand on my shoulder. I jump at the contact and whip around to see who's got their hand placed on me.

"Kid, you okay?" I hear through my cloudy mind, and it sounds warm and familiar and the only thing I can think of doing is lowering my head and placing it onto the person's chest, trying to hold back my tears.

"Come on kid", the voice says as the person wraps their arm around me and guides me blindly with them.

Because I'm so overwhelmed, I let the person guide me, as we weave this way and that through the onslaught of men moving about.

Finally, we approach the door, which he opens and ushers me in. I allow myself to look up, and I notice we are in the Captain's quarters, and when I turn to look at the person who guided me, I can see that it is Hopper.

I'm still taking in deep breathes, attempting to calm myself, but it's not working. Hopper comes to stand in front of me, and he tries to catch my panicked eyes with his, "Kid", he mutters quietly, but I don't answer him.

He lets out a long breath, "Kid, what's wrong?" he tries again, but I shake my head, tears threatening to let loose, I'm still looking down.

When I don't answer again, Hopper reaches forward and places both of his large hands on my shoulder, and he says a bit rougher this time shaking my shoulders a bit "Kid, what's going on?!"

Finally, I allow my eyes to meet his, and seeing the worry in his eye, I finally break, as I let the tears flow freely, and I begin to sob uncontrollably.

Tears cloud my vision as they pour out of me like a raging storm, I feel my body clench together. But, Hopper moves quickly and he soon pulls me into his chest.

I'm surprised at first by the contact as he holds me close. Instead of feeling fear or panic, I begin to embrace the feelings he's trying to convey to me: tenderness, warmth and understanding. And at this I let myself break.

I sob into his chest, my mouth wide open against his blue lapel, as the sobs wrack my body. Hopper holds me tighter, and I feel one of his arms begin to move, as he starts a soothing motion against my back.

"Shh...it's okay El, let it out", he says calmly as he begins to rock me.

And I listen to the large man, I finally allow all the fear and dark thoughts I've been holding inside me let loose, and once I start, I feel as if I cannot stop.

I begin to cry so hard that my body convulses a bit at the intensity, but Hopper holds me firmly, being the safe guard I need.

It seems like hours, that we both stand there. Hopper holding onto me, rocking gently, and whispering gentle words to soothe me, while I stand there and cry into him.

Finally, as if my body has dried up from all my crying, I can feel my body relax, my crying calms, and my breathing begins to return to normal.

Hopper seems to notice because he stops rocking us, and he pulls away, very slowly and tentatively.

I'm afraid to look him in the eyes, but he places a hand under my chin and forces me to look at him. He gives me light smile, "Feel better, kid?" he asks.

And I analyze his question. In all honesty, I do, it's as if my body has been wanting to release this tension and anxiety for awhile, and it finally had enough.

Through my teary eyes I give him a small nod in return, in which he says, "Good", as he leads me over to a chair and gestures for me to sit, so I do.

Hopper pulls up another chair next to me, the wooden legs scraping against the floor, he sits down next to me.

He gives me a moment, as I'm still sniffing, and catching my breath, but he finally opens his mouth to speak, "What's going on, El?" he asks in a quiet voice.

In response I merely shrug my shoulders, which elicits a small chuckle from Hopper, "Heh, kid, something's got to be bothering you, with an outburst like that".

I search within my head what has been bothering me, but I'm having trouble linking them together, but I finally let out in a raspy voice, "Everything".

I turn my head to Hopper, who is nodding his head slowly. "What is, everything?" he questions. And I let out a huff in frustration, "Everything, is everything", I sob, feeling my emotions stirring once again.

I look at him with wild eyes, he's waiting for me to continue, "I'm worried about this fight, I'm worried about losing my friends, my love, and people I care about!" I cry out.

"I'm scared of dying and not getting to have the experiences I want to have, or returning home!" My eyes desperately searching Hopper's, who's watching me with intent.

"I....I'm just..." I shake my head, not knowing where I'm going with my sputtering words.

But, Hopper answers for me, "You're scared to lose everything that means anything to you".

I turn my head back to him, and I can see the sadness that is now painted on his face. And I merely nod at his answer.

He looks down at his intertwined fingers and fiddles with them for a

moment. I watch his movements, and he raises his head to look at me.

"Sometimes..." Hopper starts, pausing to think about his next words, "Sometimes, life hits us with unexpected events".

I sit silently listening to Hopper's words. "And, sometimes, we experience events that we are scared for the outcome" he explains.

Soon he moves his hand and fishes it under his shirt, where he grabs ahold of something and pulls it up. My eyes follow his movements as I watch him pull a gold chain from under his shirt, something I've never noticed before.

"I...We all go through these events, and they are challenging, and sometimes heartbreaking" he studies the locket with his eyes and hands, turning the small locket in his hand.

"And, the most important thing to know...is that you've got to stay hopeful...to not dwell on the darkness, or else...it takes you over", he gives me a look, and I feel the heat rush to my face.

He stands and walks towards me, his hands slowly opening the locket, in which he faces towards me.

I furrow my eyebrows and move my eyes towards what lay inside. I marvel at the two pictures inside his locket. Two females stare back at me, one a beautiful woman, and the other a small smiling girl. I turn my gaze back up to Hopper, who is smiling at the locket lovingly.

He stands and still marvels at the pictures. I open my mouth to speak, but Hopper beats me to it, "The woman, she was my wife, and the girl, well...that's my Sara", he says fondly.

Although I'm pretty sure I know the answer, I still ask it, "What happened to them?" I ask as gently as possible.

Hopper shuts the locket with a quick "snap", as he looks off for a bit, but soon turns his sad eyes back to me.

He lets out a long, slow sigh, "My SaraH, you see, she got sick, real

sick", he starts as he paces around the room.

"She was about four years old, when a mysterious sickness struck her. And it stayed for a long while, never really leaving her, but holding onto her enough where she wasn't getting better".

I wait patiently for him to continue. "The sickness held onto her for almost a year. She would bounce back, but then get real bad again, it was awful to watch" Hopper explained shaking his head.

"Then one day, it just finally took her, out of the blue. And my little girl was gone" he finished solemnly. I feel my eyes begin to tear at his story, never knowing that this gruff Captain once had a family.

He turns towards me, "And...after Sarah died, it broke my wife and I apart, we were too miserable in our own grief, that...we just couldn't stay together".

Hopper folds his arms over his chest, "And, so, we separated, I joined the Navy soon after, and worked my way up", he said shrugging his shoulders.

I turn Hopper's story over in my head delicately and soon I find him sitting in the chair across from me, I look at him and we catch each others glances, "That's why, I promised nothing would happen to you...or any of your friends" Hopper says while shaking his head.

"The moment I found out you were a girl, I knew this was my second chance, because...there was this weird connection between us, and...I...I couldn't put my hands on it" he explains.

"It was as if, I got a chance to be a dad again, more so just watching over you" he confessed, and with this my eyes go wide.

"That's one of the reasons why I wanted you to stay, because I saw a lot of my daughter in you, and I didn't want to think of what would happen if I wasn't there to protect you" he says staring directly at me.

I feel myself start to grow warm at his words, knowing that there was an actual adult who cared for me, other than Joyce. "Hopper...I" I attempt to relay my words to him, giving him a small smile, but the words catch in my throat.

He shakes his head at me, "Don't worry about it kid. Just know that I'm here if you ever need anything, I know you're close to Mike and your other friends, but...sometimes adults have more insight on these things" he says.

I smile warmly at him again, as I begin to rise from my seat, as does Hopper, our dark eyes meet, and I can't help but throw my arms around him in a tight hug, in which he easily returns.

"Thank you, Hopper" I whisper into his chest, in which he pulls me in tighter. "No worries, kid" I feel the words reverberate within his chest. And I take this moment to revel at the feeling of warmth and kindness that is reverberating from Hopper.

I never had this with my own father, never this feeling, not since before my mother died. And I can't help but get the feeling that Hopper's words resonate with me as well. For, it's almost like I'm getting a second chance as well, I'm getting a father that I never had, and he gets a daughter he lost.

I snuggle into his chest more, as I bask in the moment.

I finally exit Hopper's cabin, and I can sense the calm that has finally washed over me. Hopper's words and feelings bringing me out of my cloud of darkness, worry and anxiety, and instead bringing me the sense of hope.

I allow myself to take in a long deep breath of the salty air and let it fill my lungs. I exhale the worry that was once built so deep within me and I finally feel relief.

Just as I'm about to make my way to the mess hall, I see Mike approaching me, and he has worry written all over his face.

He beelines straight for me, and I see Will is following apprehensively behind him. I give him a questioning look, but he seems determined, "El", he says a bit breathless.

"Are you okay?" he asks, looking me over. I give him a small smile, "I'm fine, why?" I question.

He gives me a look, "Will said that he saw you, and you were acting really weird, he was going to go over to you, but Hopper got there first. Then Will said you've been in the cabin ever since, and your eyes look red and puffy, is everything okay?" he asks again.

At this, I give him an honest smile and nod, "Yes, I'm okay now, thanks to Hopper" I nod towards his cabin.

"What happened?" Mike persists and I shrug my shoulders, "I...just got really overwhelmed and...I couldn't find anyone, and I just about freaked out when Hopper found me" I admit to the boys who are staring wide eyed at me.

I place a gentle hand on Mike's shoulder, "Please don't worry too much. My mind just took over and I was thinking about all of this stuff I shouldn't have...and Hopper helped me".

Mike gives me a once over, concern still written on his face, eventually he turns his mouth up just a hair, "Okay, but...if anything comes up again, please, come and find me", he gives me an earnest look.

I give him a wide smile, "Of course Mike, I was honestly looking for you, just Hopper found me first" I admit.

He gives a curt nod as his black curly hair bounces about, "I'm glad someone found you".

And at those words I blink up at him, and remark at his genuineness, "Me too" I mutter.

I look over Mike's shoulder and see Will standing there, waiting for our moment to pass. I step around Mike and give Will a warm smile, in which he returns, "Thanks for looking out for me" I tell the boy who's like my brother.

Will shakes his head, "You don't have to thank me, it's what we do" he states humbly.

I nod, "I know, but, thank you for getting Mike, and for making sure that he knew too".

Will passes a hand at me, "Anytime El, that's what we're supposed to do for each other".

Mike throws an arm over each of our shoulders, "What's say we get something to eat before Hopper tells us we're off?" he asks us and Will and I nod in agreement.

The three of us make our way to the mess hall, where we meet up with Max, who looks like she's exhausted, Mike laughs at her state.

At his laugh, Max turns quickly towards him, "What's so funny, Wheeler?" she growls.

"Heh, you look exhausted is all, not used to heavy work are you?" he picks at her.

Max rolls her eyes, "Hey, I've worked Wheeler, on a ship and in a bar, it's just been awhile since I've been on a ship" she argues back.

Mike scoffs at her, "Wait till we get out to sea" he comments.

Max shoves his shoulder roughly, "I'll be fine Wheeler, why don't you worry about yourself and your girlfriend" she whispers the last word, but raises an eyebrow in challenge.

Mike grumbles and rolls his eyes as well, and Will and I can't help but laugh at the interaction. I've discovered very quickly that Mike and Max's relationship is a very teasing one, in a brother and sister type of way. Almost like Will and I when we were younger. Knowing Mike has an older and younger sister at home, I'm sure it's almost second nature to him.

We all fall into line, receive our meal, and we sit and dig in. Shortly after we finish our meal, Dustin and Lucas crash at our table, they slump over and groan.

"Tough day, boys?" I ask them jokingly, knowing Dustin has been adding to the ship all day and Lucas has been climbing and tying ropes.

"You can say that again", Dustin mumbles with his face down on the table, as Lucas manages a hum in return.

"You boys are ridiculous", Max shakes her head at them, when Dustin slowly raises his head, and glares at her, "What did you do all day then, miss high and mighty?" he sing songs to her.

Max turns her fierce eyes to Dustin, "I've been hauling shit onto this damn boat all day as well, so don't even".

"Try carrying lumber and steel and hammering it onto the ship under the hot sun!" he challenges back.

I swear I see Max's eyes turn to icy blue daggers, she leans in closer to him so that only our small group can hear her, "At least you can take your shirt off, and not sweat with two on all day in the hot sun", she spits back, as she gestures to Dustin's bare waist.

Mike, Will and I laugh, and Lucas joins in too, "She's got you there Dustin", Will agrees.

"Pfft, whatever", Dustin mutters as he stands to go and get his dinner.

"Wimp", I hear Max mutter, and I turn to look at her, and I can't help but notice the way her blue eyes follow Dustin up to the line, when he disappears from her line of sight, she brings her focus back to our table.

However, when she turns, she catches me staring at her, and I give her a look, and I watch her face turn a light shade of pink. My eyebrows rise in realization, she tries to not make eye contact with me, but I can't help but place a cheshire like grin on my face, in which she rolls her eyes at.

Once Dustin and Lucas are finished eating, we are idly sitting and just chatting away. When, we here the next four bells and a low warble that echoes across the ship.

We all hustle up and head out on deck. From where I am standing I can see Hopper standing by the wheel near the back of the ship, with Callahan and Powell standing near the side.

Us and the rest of the seamen filter out across the deck, and we stand silently, awaiting Hopper's words.

Hopper clears his throat and raises his head to us, "Okay lads, today, we set sail and set course towards the monsters nest" he bellows, and the silence strings between us.

"It will take almost three weeks to reach the centerfold of the bermuda triangle, and we will stay steady with the rest of the fleet, as we branch off and spread off, a special announcement will be made".

"I want to thank all of you men," he stops and makes eye contact with me and raises his brow, "For working together to stop this onslaught, before it gets any worse than it already is" he states, and I feel the men shifting around me, knowing that they are nervous as well.

"So, man your stations, and get ready to set sail!" he cheers raising a fist into the air, and all us mimic his actions and raise our fists into the air as we call out, "Aye, aye, Captain!", and cheers are heard all around.

We all move about, and get to our stations. I look about the harbor and see the dozens of other ships getting ready to set sail as well.

There is movement on all of them, and a harmony of shouts and orders ring out through the harbor. The locals of this small town have gathered by the shore and they are waving and yelling and cheering us on.

I feel my heart and spirit lift a bit at this action, and my soul feels more ready as well.

My small group of friends join me at the railing, and we lean over the edge, watching the *Hawk* give small, steady movements towards the sea.

The wind is with us, as it pushes against our sails, and the boys hair is flipping about wildly, and I smile wildly at them.

We watch as the ships behind us whip out their sails, that snap quickly as the wind grabs them.

"Drop the sails!" comes across the deck, and we turn our heads up to watch our brilliantly white sails drop from their masts, as they whip out, catching the wind within them.

We feel the quick pull as the ship begins to move forward. We turn to look back out to the sea and marvel as the King's fleet moves out.

I look up and down the railings and smile at my friends, who cheer and let out whoops around me.

I turn to my right, where Mike stands beside me, he is already gazing at me, and I can't help but give him a wide grin.

His hair whips about him, and it is a marvelous sight, I watch his lips move as he mouths, "I love you", to me.

I gently mouth it back to him as well, as we stare into our dark eyes.

The *Hawk* moves more steadily out to sea, as we prepare for battle.

**Two chapters in less than a week? Haven't done that for awhile!
Thanks again for your patience!**

I really hope you liked this chapter and enjoyed the Hopper and Eleven moment as well! And I even threw in some Max and Dustin as well. I honestly like her with either boy, but more so Dustin, however, she and Lucas are cute together as well, I just have an easier time writing Dustin too. BUT my main love is obviously Mileven, so that's my main focus :)

Anyways, like always, PLEASE REVIEW! I LOOOOOVE hearing what you guys have to say, it's a writers crack for sure!

Till next time!

26. A Friendly Fight

Aaaaand, I know, it took me awhile to get another chapter out, again, been busy, especially with the wedding planning and everything else. But, thank you all for the reviews as always, I love reading them, for they always put a smile on my face!

So, we are nearing the approaching battle, let's see what happens!

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things* or *Bloody Jack*.

Mike's Point of View:

It's been a couple of days since we've sailed out from the safety of Florida, and with each passing day, the growing anxiety and anxiousness of the looming battle moves like crashing waves against everyone on board.

I've noticed that El seems to be the most nervous. I can tell she is desperately trying to hold it together, but, just knowing her so well, I can read her body movements more than she knows.

I study her as she tries to keep herself busy, knowing that if her mind is on something else, then the thought of battle moves to the back of her mind.

However, once her distraction has left her, the worry seems to grow within her, I watch her as she takes steady breaths to help her through her moments of anxiety, and then she moves on. But, I know deep down in her gut, she worries.

I approach her on the fifth day out at sea. She is up in the old foretop, where she is meticulously cleaning a stack of cutlasses.

She's so withdrawn within her thoughts and movements that she doesn't even notice me step into the foretop. I sit and study her, waiting to see how long it takes.

It takes longer than I expect as she finally raises her head enough, where she startles upon seeing me. "Jesus Mike, don't do that" she

exclaims.

I can't help but chuckle at her, "I've been up here for a couple of minutes and you didn't even realize I was here" I state, eyeing her warily.

She gives me a hard stare and lets out a huff in frustration, as she rolls her eyes at me. She casts her glance back down to the cutlass that lays in her lap, she fiddles with it.

I take her in before I speak, "El, are you sure you're okay?" I ask as gently as possible, without trying to sound accusing.

She snaps her head up to meet my gaze and she frowns at me, "How many times do I have to tell you, yes, I'm fine!" she growls through gritted teeth.

I raise my hands in defense, "Woah, El, you don't need to bite my head off, I was just asking" I say shaking my head at her.

She squints her eyes harder at me, "And you've asked a hundred times, and you won't leave it alone", she huffs.

I match her frown as I take in her words. El lowers her head once again, refusing to meet my gaze, and I can tell she's trying to hold back her tears. Of fear or sadness, I'm not sure.

My brain jumps to the conclusion that I should probably just leave her be, but my gut says something else, knowing that deep down, my love is hurting.

So, I let out my own breath and I stand. El's head twitches towards me, but she still doesn't raise her head, I'm sure she thinks I'm leaving.

However, I move the cutlasses she has laid out beside her, and push them over to where I was currently sitting. I crouch down and reach towards El's lap and I gingerly take the cutlass from her hand. She doesn't fight my movements.

I lay the cutlass in my hand in the pile with the others and then I turn back to her. I sigh, as she is still refusing to even look at me. So,

instead of challenging the girl, I sit beside her and I stretch out my long legs in front of me.

Without missing a beat, I reach my right arm around the small girl, and I reach my left arm to her left side. With little hesitation I pull gently underneath her armpits and with a huff, I lift, well, drag her into my lap.

She isn't fighting the sudden contact or movement, which I take as a good sign. She stretches her legs out in between mine. I slowly wrap my long arms around her chest and I pull her in close. I rest my head against the back of hers, turning slightly to the right so that I can still talk to her.

Together, we breathe in and out, synchronizing our breaths as one. I desperately try to pour my feelings into El as her back is pressed up against my chest. I slowly begin to feel her tension melt away from her, as she finally relaxes into me.

I hear her give a sniff, and she moves her hand to wipe at her face. I move my head forward cautiously and lay my chin on her small shoulder. Her head is finally raised up, her tan cheeks sparkle with her shed tears.

I move my arm from her waist and raise it to her cheek and wipe away her tears as well. El slumps against me as she turns her face towards mine.

Silently, I take in her expression. Her beautiful dark eyes gleam with still unshed tears, but they also show signs of unsaid worry. Her mouth is still turned downwards, but she is no longer holding it taught, revealing that she is not frustrated or angry, but is full of uncertainty.

I let my eyes wander over her, and my face softens, as I feel her eyes moving across my face as well, trying to read what I'm feeling. I close the space between us and place a soft and gentle kiss upon her wet cheek.

I allow my lips to linger there for awhile, I can taste her salty tears on my lips as I pull away. Our eyes meet again, and El finally falters as

she wraps her arms quickly around my neck and tucks her face away into my neck.

Her crying is slow and quiet. As she lets the stress of her worries melt away. I just hold her firmly against me as I rub my hands soothingly up and down her back. I place gentle kisses against her forehead, her cheek and nose, silently allowing her to know I'm there.

Finally, after her quiet cry, she pulls away from my neck, which is wet from her tears, but I find myself not caring. Our hair sticks to one another from the warm connection.

She pulls away just enough to stare into my face, and I give her a soft smile, as I place another kiss upon her nose. She giggles slightly at the contact.

My eyes catch hers, and I finally speak, "You know...you can always talk to me right?" I ask the girl in my arms.

El ducks her head and gives a small nod, "I know...it's just...been hard" she looks back up at me. "I just broke down like this with Hopper before we left, and I thought I was okay but..." she trails off.

My face softens, "It takes time El, and with everyone else on edge...it doesn't really help" I offer.

El shrugs her shoulders, "Yes, but this battle is going to happen no matter what, and I need to be able to do something instead of just stand there...and do nothing" she whispers.

I lift my hand and brush a stray hair that had blown across El's beautiful face and I place it softly behind her ear. She finally gives me her warm smile.

"I know it will be scary, and it will be intense too. But, we will all have each others backs, we won't let anyone in our group get hurt...I promise" I nuzzle my face with hers.

El gives a small laugh, "You, promise?" she smirks at me.

I laugh as well, "Yes, I truly promise, El", I say to her as we make eye contact once again.

El raises her arms and rests her hands behind my head, she gingerly plays with my shaggy hair, and I can't help but purr at her gentle movements.

She lets out another small laugh, "How did I get so lucky?" she asks as she continues her movements.

"Heh, I ask myself that everyday when I see you and your beautiful smile, your gorgeous self and your amazing personality" I counter as I pull her close against me.

At this she lets out a strand of giggles against my chest, "Mike!" she squeals, as I begin to tickle her sides. She attempts to stop my actions, but I'm too quick and strong, so I hold her back.

Her laughter is contagious as I join in with her. "Mike! Stop, please!" she says inbetween breaths as she wrestles against me.

"Only if you promise to talk to me when something's going on", I state to her as I continue to press my fingers into her ribs.

"Okay, okay, I promise!" she squeals and she wriggles. I finally stop my assault and let her go from my grasps.

She quickly swats me across my chest and I let out a small "Ow!" as I rub the spot with a small smile. "You're a jerk" she states simply eyeing me narrowly.

I chuckle and pull her back against me. My legs are still outstretched in front of me, and now El is sitting straddling my waist, and our eyes begin to change.

Her eyes flitter to my mouth, as mine do hers, and I slowly bring her close once again. She places her small hands against my chest and she ducks her head down to meet mine.

Our lips ghost against each other, I can just barely feel the pull of a smile on her face. "Hmmm" she hums, as my eyes flutter, "What?" I whisper, our breaths mingling together.

"I don't know if you deserve this or not", she contemplates, as she teases me by bringing her lips so deliciously close to mine. I move my

head up to meet her lips, but she pulls away.

Her hands hold onto my shoulder steadily as I watch her. She moves delicately across my body, as she presses her chest fully against mine, and I can't help the groan that escapes.

"El", I moan as I reach my head up and place light kisses against her throat. She hums in contentment, and I attempt to bring her head down to meet mine, but she again resists, and laughs as I growl in frustration.

"You know what this does to me", I whisper huskily as I press my face into her chest, wishing her damn shirt and vest weren't in the way.

El only continues to giggle as she presses her center down against mine, and I arch my hips hungrily at the contact, I place my hand behind her back as I press her against me.

"Don't...start" I growl as I chase kisses up her chest and up to her neck once again. My dark eyes meet her warm amber ones, and I can tell she's just as excited as I am.

"You deserved a little torture after what you just did" she teases, as she reaches behind my head to tangle her tantalizing hands into my untamable curls.

I open my mouth to retort, but finally, El rushes forward, and closes the burning gap between us, as we share an open mouth kiss.

Her tongue quickly and eagerly finds mine as they tangle in a fierce battle. Our kiss grows a little sloppy, as our hunger and passion fills the space between us.

I slowly pull her tucked shirt from her pants, and run my hands up her smooth back. She purrs in contentment.

Our lips mash together in a passion filled moment, meeting each other at the same pace. I gingerly move my hands around her front, as they find exactly what they are looking for.

I grasp El's breasts gently within each of my hands, and this elicits a moan from said girl who sits above me, and I can't help but smile into

our kiss.

I can't help but tease the girl who is kissing me senselessly. And honestly, I begin to feel my own senses slip away from me as our mouths mirthlessly continue to play against each other as our passion grows between us.

After what seems like a sweet eternity, El and I finally re-emerge from the foretop. El's lucky, where she has hidden her long curly hair, that is messed up from my hands tangly into her brown locks, up into her beloved cap. And she has tied back her hair into a firm ponytail.

Me, I'm not as lucky, although my hair tends to stick up in odd angles and curls this way and that, it is much more noticeable of what El and I had gotten up to in the foretop.

I try to calm my curls, but it's useless. El has neatly tucked away her shirt and has put herself together. My clothes are wrinkled and a bit more disheveled, but I'll worry about what the guys and Max have to say later, the teasing is totally worth it after that lovely experience only El and I can share with one another.

El and I are giving each other knowing looks and glances, our cheeks a matching red thinking about our activities. As we carry the cutlasses back to their holding docks along the walls of the ship.

We are idly talking to each other putting the cutlasses away, not having a care in the world as we exchange small coos and compliments to one another that we don't notice the rest of our small group approach us.

"Ach, hem", a loud clearing of the throat is heard behind us and El and I whip around. We are met with scandalous looks from our friends. I see out of the corner of my eye El's head is turned towards me, and I feel my face heat up.

I give them a questioning look, trying to sound as non-suspicious as possible, "What?" I ask shrugging my shoulders at our group.

Dustin opens his mouth to speak, but Max beats him, "Where have

you two been?" she questions giving us a knowing look.

Dustin turns his head towards the red headed girl with a scowl, "Hey, I was going to ask them that", he pouts. Max turns his way with folded arms, "Well, you should have asked quicker then", she spits at him.

Hoping that they will continue to bicker, El and I make eye contact and attempt to slink away. "Hold it right there" Max speaks to us, but she is still eyeing Dustin.

El and I stop our movements and give a sigh of defeat. "What is it Max?" El asks gently.

Max's blue eyes meet El's amber eyes, and she gives her a look. "You heard me, where have you two been?" she asks again.

El and I give each other a quick panicked look, and then we turn back to the group. Lucas and Will are looking at us suspiciously as well, and the feeling is not a good one.

"Yeah, where have you been off to with my sister?" Will questions.

At this El steps forward, "Why do you guys need to know where we are at all times?", "It's not like we can go very far", she gestures to the sailing ship around us.

"You guys totally missed practice", Lucas brings his voice forward. At this, it dawns on El and I that Lucas was right, we were supposed to work with them on swordsmanship, and to start teaching Max as well.

My mouth opens in realization, and I can see El doing the same, "Uh...we, uh.." I try, but the words won't form correctly.

"You were off fooling around again, weren't you?" Max throws out shamelessly, in which El and I can't fight the red off of our faces at her words.

At our silence Dustin lets out a low, "Ooooh", and Lucas is laughing. Max raises her eyebrow in challenge, and Will rolls his eyes in disdain.

"Come on guys, it's not like that" El finally speaks.

Lucas steps in, "Not like that, it's *always* like that for you two when you are alone".

El huffs in frustration, and I speak up, "Guys, come on, it's not like we get a ton of alone time together, we're allowed to do what we want" I argue.

"Except the one time someone else other than us finds you guys....together" Dustin tries to gesture awkwardly with his hands.

I shake my head, "It's not going to happen guys, and besides, once the war is over, then El and I are off anyways" I state looking between them.

Lucas and Dustin startle a little bit, "So, what. Our group isn't going to stay together?" he questions quietly.

I open my mouth, when my last words dawn on me a bit. *Is it true that we won't all be together again?* I think silently to myself.

"So, since you and El are together, that's it for us then, we're just shoved to the side?" Lucas is now glaring at us.

El shakes her head quickly, "No, no, of course not! Guys!" she says and at her last words she grabs my hand and steps towards Dustin who is closest to her and grabs his hand as well.

She pulls us into a small group, "We will *always* be together, one way or another, no matter if our paths take different roads", she earnestly looks between all of us.

Lucas seems the most skeptical, and looks down to his feet. I feel the tension begin to build between us and panic stirs within my stomach.

Will speaks up, "El's right" he says while grabbing onto Max's and Lucas hands, who look at the smallest boy.

"We may all take different paths, but...what we've built together, it won't break" he looks at all of us.

And I begin to feel the tension melt around us, as we all smile at one another. Our eyes turn to Dustin, who is having a hard time making eye contact with us, but eventually he sighs, "I know, it's just we've been together for years now, and I don't know what life would be like without you guys" he confesses.

Our looks soften at the curly haired boy, but he turns back to El and I, "Just make sure no one catches you two, don't want either of you thrown overboard" he chuckles.

I roll my eyes, "Dustin, Hopper knows El's and Max's secret, we'll be okay" I say softly.

Dustin nods, "Okay, but no babies", he points his finger between us, at this I can feel my cheeks flare at his words, and I'm sure El's are doing the same. "Dustin", I growl warningly.

And at this everyone begins to laugh, and all is forgiven.

Since El and I had forgotten about our friends training, we decided to pick it up right then and there.

El hands out each cutlass to each of our friends, and when she gets to Max, she very gently hands the fire haired girl the weapon.

Max seems hesitant at first, but she accepts the cutlass from El, and she holds it firmly in her hand, as she casts it away from her leg.

El pairs off Lucas and Will, and pairs Max with Dustin, since he is the slower one of the bunch, in which Dustin huffs at this declaration, but doesn't complain too much, since he smiles shyly to Max, in which she tucks her head, but I can see a small smile upon her face as well.

I work with Will and Lucas on their feet work, but I listen from the side to El and her teaching's to Max.

"Now, if someone lunges at you, you have to be quick", El explains to Max as the red haired girl hangs on every one of El's words to make sure she doesn't miss anything.

El and Dustin are squared off against one another. El's posture is perfect, as she instructs Dustin to lunge at her. Although, it is just a demonstration, Dustin comes at El with intent. However, unluckily for Dustin, El is the most skilled with a sword on this deck.

And El moves as fast as lightning, as she moves the opposite way of Dustin's lunge, not even moving her sword, she takes another step and kicks at Dustin's unstable legs, he tumbles to the deck as his sword clatters out of his reach. El places a foot on Dustin's chest, her sword pointed firmly at his neck.

"See, like that" she nods towards Max, who's looking at her in awe. "Wow, El, you're pretty good" she remarks.

El smiles at the compliment as she turns towards me and gives me a small wink, "Learned from the best, with the best sparring partner".

Max looks to me at El's words and her eyebrows rise, she points a finger at me, "Mike?" she questions, and at her tone, my mouth falls. "Mike, taught you and was your sparring partner?" Max asks in an unsure tone.

El turns back towards the other girl and she nods her head, but then shrugs her shoulders, "Well, I mean, we learned from Hopper too, whose really good with a sword, but Mike's a good sparring partner, and he taught me *some* things", she adds in.

At this my ears perk, "Only *some* things" I throw back to her. She casts her glance over her shoulder in which although is challenging, is also very seductive in my opinion, and I can't help but let my mouth turn into a half grin.

"You have to admit, Hopper taught me the most", she wiggles her eyebrows teasingly. My mouth falls open into an 'O', and Max's is trying to cover her laughing behind her hand.

I slowly approach the beautiful girl who challenges me, I give her a look, and I watch her face turn into a stern one.

I clearly stand a head taller than her, and she has to tilt her head up to look me into the eyes. "Is that a challenge?" I question the

beautiful girl.

She raises her eyebrows and shrugs her right shoulder, "I don't know, Mr. Wheeler, is it?" she mocks me with her tantalizing looks. And it takes every fiber of my being to not swoop into her now and hold her close, while I show her what a real challenge looks like. However, I obviously hold myself back, and tilt my head back to her.

"I guess we will have to show, Max, here, what a *real* swordsman looks like", I challenge her, and I watch amused as her eyes go wide in shock at my words.

Her warm amber eyes begin to turn dark, "Challenge accepted, Mr. Wheeler" she coos as she steps away from me again, she approaches Max, and takes the sword from her hand.

At our little altercation, Lucas and Will have obviously stopped their practice and have decided to watch our interaction. I approach Lucas and reach my hand out towards his sword. Both of the guys give me shit eating grins.

"You're totally whipped", Lucas shakes his at me, as he hands me his sword. I slap him quickly with the flat side of my blade, and he jumps in surprise, "Watch it!" he growls at me, but Will is laughing along.

I turn back around to face El, who although has a serious look upon her face, I see her mouth tilts upward slightly in amusement.

Max and Dustin move over to join Lucas and Will as they stand by watching with eagerness. "Two shillings on El, she's totally going to whip Wheeler's ass!" Max turns to the boys, who jump in on the betting.

"I'll join in on that one!" Will turns to Max, but Lucas and Dustin shake their heads, "No way, Mike will definitely pin her first", Dustin, thankfully sides with me because honestly, I'm not sure how this fight will end.

Instead of joining in on my friend's deals, I merely roll my eyes and El and I slowly approach one another.

We hold our swords out to our sides, and we eye each other. "Ready to lose, like always?" El jeers at me and I scoff, "You, wish" I bite back.

El turns her head to the others, "Pay close attention, Max....and you guys should be watching to" El remarks.

Max is nodding her head wildly with excitement, waiting for our scrimmage to begin, while the other guys roll their eyes at El's comment.

El faces me once again, "Ready?" she gives me a wink. I give her a bold smile, "Ready when you are", I state back, and before I'm ready, El pounces.

I react slower than normal, however, I'm able to block El's blow, and quickly, we begin our dance.

We move around our swords clashing together, as our feet move steadily beneath us. It's a fluid motion that we have adapted to in our infinite times we have practiced together. However, this time the dance feels much more intimate than the other times. And I believe it's because neither wants to lose.

Instead of our usual movements that are predictable now to the others, we are both aiming and moving in different ways that attempt to surprise the other.

El skillfully pushes me back as we approach the railing of the ship, I can hear Max and Will cheering loudly, as Dustin and Lucas throw out moves for me to do to get back into the fight.

I inwardly sigh at their lack of trust in me. Little do they know that I'm allowing El to back me into a corner so as to counter her at just the right time.

As we inch closer and closer to the railing, I can see the passion of excitement grow on El's face, as she believes to have me cornered, however, I turn my head ever so slightly to glance behind me, and there!

Just as my back is about to hit the railing I do a very unexpected

move, and duck down just as El swings her sword forward, I step behind her, and as she is off balance, I take her foot with mine and pull.

El starts forward as she falls towards the railing. I let a smile grace my face briefly as I hear Dustin and Lucas cheer out, "Yeah, that's how you do it Mike!". While I hear Max cry out, "You're seriously going to let him do that to you?"

Just as I turn back around to El, I see she has caught herself on the railing instead of clamoring to the deck below.

She gains her balance swiftly and turns back to me, a wicked grin plastered on her sun tanned face. She turns her head to me, "Nice move Wheeler" she remarks between breathes.

I shrug my shoulders at her, "Learned from the best, right?" I throw back to her cockily, and soon enough she swoops at me once again, and our swords are once again clanging against one another.

Our movements start to become closer together versus long ranged swings and stabs. Our bodies are close to one another as we begin to use our free hands to block close range blows.

I can feel the sweat begin to beat down from my forehead at our fierce movements, and I can see El is beginning to as well.

Our breathing is becoming heavier and harsher, and I can't help but feel a bit enamored by our state of affairs. I can't help the large smile that plasters my face, and El notices.

"What's...with...the..grin?" she asks between clashes. I chuckle, "Just...thinking about...how...close we....are right....now" I answer back.

I watch as El furrows her eyebrows a bit, as my words sink in, and I see a smile grow on her face as well along with a tint of red covering her cheeks.

She only shakes her head, as we continue our assault. "Come on El, yield him!" Max cheers. El lets out a breathy laugh as determination crosses her face, "You heard her Mike, I'm taking you down!" she

growls at me, as her movements begin to become quicker with determination.

This surprises me a bit, as El begins to spin her way about in a way I have yet to see, and watching her movements startles me, because, I can't help but enamored at the way she moves.

I realize in this brief moment I've lost concentration, and El knows it. She continues her onslaught and with my moment of distraction, I've lost my momentum, and I can't keep up.

"Finish him, El!" Will cries, and with sheer determination, El corners me once again, and she surprises me once again by ducking down and reaching for my leg. With the back side of her blade she sweeps her sword behind my calves and pulls, and in a second I'm on my butt and my sword clatters to the side.

I wince at the impact and when I open my eyes, I see El's dark amber eyes sparkling brightly as she points her sword at my throat, as she says with a short breath, "Yield".

I open my mouth in surprise, but know I'm caught, I let out a sigh and nod my head, "Yes, I yield", I state.

A wide smile graces El's face as she removes her sword from my neck and instead reaches her empty hand forward to help me up.

She gives me a gentle look, and even though my pride is once again smashed by the illustrious girl, I reach forward to lock our hands together as she pulls me to my feet.

She pulls me a little closer than comfortable in front of the crew, and she whispers into my ear, "That was amazing Mike, you've really grown", she pulls back with a brilliant look on her face, and I can't help but melt at her words.

"Thanks" I say with a dumb look on my face. And we are soon approached by Max and the other guys. "Nice one, El! You're amazing!" Max gushes, and El ducks her head at the praise.

Dustin and Lucas aren't as happy, they give me a sour look, "Yeah, nice one Mike, now we owe them two shillings each!" Dustin shouts

raising his hands high.

I roll my eyes at him, "Sorry Dustin, shouldn't have made a bet then" I shrug my shoulders.

I turn to look at El, "She's always been the better fighter" I answer humbly, smiling widely at the beautiful girl beside me.

El's cheek's flush even more, as she knocks into my shoulder playfully, I chuckle and look at Max, "So, did you learn anything?" I ask her.

Max is bouncing on the balls of her feet, "Oh definitely, El is *not* a force to be reckoned with!" she laughs.

El shrugs her shoulder, "Mike is a good teacher too" she says honestly looking at me. At her warm look, I can't help but let a small blush dance across my cheeks.

The guys roll their eyes at us, "You two are awful", Lucas huffs shaking his head.

El and I break our moment and return focus to the others, "Okay then, Max, now that you've seen some moves, let's practice them" El states moving towards the red head.

We break off into our parrying groups once again, this time Max and the rest of the guys seem much more interested in learning after watching El and I.

I cast my eyes over to El, who is talking with her "teaching" voice with Max and Dustin, explaining a simple move. My eyes can't break away from her, as I stare longingly. El has finished her explanation, and as if she can feel my gaze on her, she turns and our eyes catch.

I startle a bit, being caught, but El gives me a bashful smile, and throws me another wink. I can't help but sigh in content, knowing how lucky I am to have a girl like her by my side.

Later that night, it's El's and mine's turn on the night shift. It's quiet on the ship's deck since less men are needed on parole at night, since,

well we are surrounded by fifty other ships.

And since we are Able bodied seaman now, our shifts consist of walking through the ship to make sure everything is going smoothly. Only about twenty other men are scattered about.

So, I take advantage of this dark night to pull El into one of her old hideaways. She squeals in delight as I pull her along.

"Mike, what are you-" El tries to breath out, but I cut her off with my lips pressed firmly against hers. She sighs at the contact as her small arms wrap around my neck.

We stay in that position for a long while, embracing this moment alone. El is the first to break contact, but we still hold each other close.

She looks up to me with her big eyes, "You know, you really did amazing today" she states.

I look down at her, "I know, you already said that". She smiles, "I know I did, but I just really wanted you to know that you are amazing and you've grown so much, Mike", she states sweetly.

I nuzzle my nose into her, "I did amazing? What about you and those little tricks?" I push at her. She giggles delightfully into my chest, "You liked that?" she teases.

"Heh, like it? Did you realize that those little spins you were doing, is what threw me off in the first place?" I press a kiss into her head.

She snuggles closer, "I figured that's what made you fumble, so I went with it" she shrugs her shoulders, but then laughs again.

"What?" I ask her grinning, El looks up to with an amused look, "Let's just hope those monsters don't have any spins or fancy moves, or your a goner", she teases.

I let out a harsh laugh, "Ha, ha very funny" I begin to pepper her face with small quick kisses, in which she giggles into.

However, soon enough, El pulls at my shirt collar and she brings me

into a deep kiss. Which quickly escalates into a passion filled moment.

Our hands roam here and there, reveling in this moment together. I pull away, "I love these moments together" I whispered huskily as I reach down to capture her neck between my teeth, she groans into the pressure.

"Me, too" she says back, as she twirls her delicate fingers into my hair. I moan into her neck. *God, I love it when she does that*, I think to myself.

Our breaths become more heated and quicken in pace. We remove the other shirts as we lay on the floor together, wrapped in each others embrace.

Although, we do not give into temptations that are increasingly hard to diminish, we spend time wrapped up in each others presence and explore each other in new ways.

Alright, another chapter down! I actually really enjoyed writing this one. It was fun to write in Mike's point of view this time because El's was getting repetitive, and I hope you all enjoyed it as well! Lots of awesome Mileven fluff!

As always, PLEASE REVIEW! I love your comments and reading them, they always make me so happy!

Till next time!

27. It Begins

Hello everyone, I hope you are still all enjoying this story, I haven't heard as much as usual from people, but I know it's not always prevalent to review. I just love reading reviews because it truly does help add to the story, and I do like adding some ideas that you bring up.

Anyways, on with the story.

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things* or *Bloody Jack*.

El's Point of View:

It's been just over two weeks since we've set out from Florida. The weather is still increasingly warm and the ocean is a dark, rich blue color.

I've found that my nerves have settled for now, especially with Mike and the rest of the gangs support. The looming battle also stays out of my mind when I keep myself busy, this includes tending to my duties, practicing sword skills with just about everyone on the ship, and well...spending moments alone with Mike *really* help keep those dark thoughts away.

I blush as my mind wanders to mine and Mike's moments alone, tucked away in my secret hiding holes. We've attempted to find more time for those moments, and we don't waste them when we do.

My mind slowly begins to drift to Mike's hands moving across my smooth skin, under my shirt trailing up to...

But, I'm shaken from my thoughts when Hopper's voice booms out across the deck, "Alright, crew! Time for a meeting!"

I feel my face redden at the shaken thoughts from my head, and desperately try to compose myself as I follow the flow of the crew as we approach the back of the ship.

My eyes scan the deck for my group of friends, however, I don't have to look far as a warm hand wraps itself around the base of my arm.

I stop my movements and see Will's smiling face, I return the smile as Dustin, Max and Mike soon find us as well.

Lucas, being his time in the rigging, is probably sitting in the netting, listening in from above.

We are all grouped and packed together tightly on the deck. Most of the seaman are shirtless because of the stifling tropical air. Dustin and Mike are included in this group. It takes a lot of resolve for me to not stare at Mike's chest.

I casually glance over, however, my eyes catch Max's who's trying to 'casually' look over Dustin. Our gazes meet accidentally, and I give her a sly smile. I watch her face turn as red as her hair as she turns away sharply. I can't help but chuckle and turn my attention back to Hopper.

Hopper's gaze takes in the men on deck, his arms are tucked behind his back firmly, and he has his chest puffed out, just so.

I watch as he takes in a deep breath as he speaks, "Men, as I've announced shortly before leaving the shore of Florida, that I would call you all to attention".

We all stand about silently, taking in Hopper's words. Hopper carefully glances out across the ocean, I follow his gaze and take in the numerous ships that sail along with us. However, we are all very spread out, we would have to give a signal to one another if we wanted to speak.

Hopper's gaze turns back towards us, "As I'm sure many of you can recall the meeting of which took place within the town hall, and I had suggested a change of strategy", he pauses, and men around us nod their heads.

Hopper sighs, "And as you know, this idea was rejected by vote", he explains. There's some grunts and shaking of heads from the crew.

"However", Hopper continues, and pauses giving the men a steely look, "The many other Captain's who agreed with my idea, met in secret", and at these words, hushed voices rushed across the deck.

Hopper holds up one of his hands to silence the whispers, and a hush falls on the deck. "We met a couple days before heading off, and we've decided to pull a mutiny on the other Captain's", and at this announcement the voices begin again, much more louder this time.

With little patience, Hopper raises his voice, "I know what you are all thinking, mutiny against the King's ships, our brothers", at this some heads nod.

"But, you will be surprised to know that actually more than half of the Captain's of this fleet agreed to the mutiny...and we came up with a new plan...to fight the queen" Hopper bellows out.

The sailors around us are looking at one another skeptically and with confused and worried faces. "I'm sorry to have sprung this on you so....suddenly, but with the circumstances, it had to be done. I'm sure the other Captain's in on this plan are or have given the same speech to their crew as well".

"I, uh...I understand if you don't agree with this plan, but I couldn't afford to lose another crew" Hopper shakes his head, and at this, he's grabbed the whole crews attention.

Hopper looks out past us again, "The last time we tried to face the monster's, I lost all but fifteen men, and we were lucky to survive", he says solemnly.

"Not only with the new information I received while on land, but through my own experiences...I couldn't afford to *not* come up with a new plan. You men, are too valuable for me to lose".

The men are taking in Hopper's words, and I can tell by Hopper's worried look, he's afraid of a mutiny of his own. However, a sailor steps forward, and my eyes widen when I realize it's Jonathan.

Hopper's eyes land squarely on the young man who has stepped forward. Jonathan's hair has grown long, and he wears it in a neat ponytail. He looks up to Hopper and opens his mouth to speak, "Captain Hopper", he starts, "It would be an honor, as always, to follow you into battle....the way you plan it, even if it means mutiny", and at this Jonathan takes off his black cap and bows

forward to Hopper.

At Jonathan's actionis, I see Steve has moved forward and stands beside Jonathan. "Aye", "I too, will join you in battle, Sir", and Steve copies Jonathan's motions and bows forward as well.

Soon, the whole crew slowly makes their way forward and either silently bows their heads in acceptance or state one word agreeances. Eventually, I too move forward, and I know my friends follow close behind me, as we bow our heads to Hopper.

We all eventually stand once again, and Hopper's face is that of astonishment. I can't help but grin and shake my head at the poor Captain for feeling as if his own crew would abandon him.

Hopper allows a small smile to pierce his face, and he shakes his head at us. "I promise, that I will try to make this battle as safe as possible for you men. I want to end this war, and bring you all home" he sighs.

The men pound their fists into the air and let out a loud cheer. "Captain Hopper!" is heard echoing across the deck. I hear Will's and Dustin's voice boom out beside me, and Mike and I catch eyes. We smile widely at each other and join the rest of the crew in the cheer for Hopper.

I feel my chest bloom in pride for Hopper, for a man who deserves such a loyal crew, it's definitely Hopper.

Hopper had gone on to explain the new plan to us while we all stayed on deck. He then discussed how he would be pulling groups aside to make sure they had the exact logistics to how the attack played out.

This included Lucas, who being apart of the rigging crew, needed to learn the new movements and direction in which we would be sailing. The more time and preparation we have beforehand will give us an advantage once the battle began.

Mike and I continue to drill the rest of the crew, who have all

remarkably become much more adept in handling their swords, and I'm secretly impressed.

Max has joined the younger boys in their practice, since she is newer to the movements and skills, however, she very quickly proves herself to be an affirmable foe when it comes to her weilding a cutlass.

Even against young Finny, who has grown quite a bit since joining the crew, in height and skill, he shows a hard time fighting against the greenhorn.

"You've got to move your feet quicker on the strike!" I yell to Max, who is stumbling a bit over her feet.

She lets out a frustrated sigh as she wipes at her sweat drenched brow, "I know, I'm trying!" she cries out as Finny lashes at her again, in which she nimbly blocks, but steps awkwardly, off balancing her in turn.

Finny notices this, and strikes once again. He adds in a bit of a spin, but then fakes a perry towards the unsuspecting girl, Max flinches, and Finny kicks at her knees, causing her to tumble to the wooden deck.

Finny holds his sword to her neck triumphantly. "Yield" he states with a wide grin. Max is glaring daggers at the poor boy, as her chest heaves to catch her breath.

She knocks the sword away in annoyance, "Yeah, yeah, whatever kid", she growls at the young boy, who's smile turns quickly into a frown.

I take in Max's scowl and approach her. She casually glances at me then turns away abruptly. I place a gentle hand on her shoulder, "Max, there's nothing to worry about, you're getting it", I encourage her.

The red head casts me a look and rolls her eyes, "El, I've been practicing for days, and honestly...I'm not getting any better" she sighs.

"Yes, you are Max. You're still learning, but getting better everyday" I

state, but Max still shrugs her shoulders in defeat.

Finny approaches us, "Max, let's go again!" he says excitedly. Max turns to look at the energetic boy, he gives her that wide, sweet smile, and gives her those adorable blue eyes. I can't help but let my heart melt a bit at his look. And I can see Max's tense state melt as well. *This boy will melt hearts with those eyes*, I think to myself.

Max lets out a defeated sigh, "Fine", she huffs as she bends to retrieve her sword from the deck.

She readies herself, as does young Finny, and once again they are clashing their cutlasses against one another. But, this time there is a lighter feel around Max, as a grin betrays her face, as she lets out a small chuckle as she parry's against Finny.

I watch them, my eyes scanning, watching their quick movements. I step in when I need to, and they both listen to my advice, adjusting their movements just so, and they continue on.

They continue to work for awhile, when finally the lunch bell tolls out across the deck. Max and Finny's movements stop, and they collapse to the deck, exhausted from the ongoing training.

They are both attempting to catch their breaths, as sweat drips from their brows. Their shirts stick to their saturated skin. Max turns her head towards me and I give her a thumbs up. She allows a small smile back, as she stands.

Max turns to Finny as she offers her hand, he takes it gratefully as she pulls him to his feet. She rubs her hand affectionately into his dark, curly locks. "Nice job, kid" she remarks.

Finny pulls away, but smiles at the red head, "Yeah, not too bad yourself, red" he comments with a shrug, and she pushes him slightly, teasingly.

"Yeah, that was a lot better, you two", I remark. Finny nods, but takes off quickly, surly hungry from their sparring, Max comes to my side as we walk towards the mess hall.

She lets out a long breath and pulls at her shirt that sticks to her skin.

"This, sucks" she exclaims, as she fans her shirt, attempting to let in the cool air.

I can't help but laugh, "Get used to it" I mutter as we walk. "How do you put up with this heat?" she moans. "Lots of practice" I chuckle, feeling happier that I'm used to wearing a lot of layers in this dreaded heat.

After lunch, Hopper pulls Mike and I aside to go over the attack plan. He looks over us with his dark eyes, "How has training been going?" he asks calmly.

I nod my head, "Good. There are a lot of crew members who have improved greatly" I state, puffing out my chest in pride.

I hear Mike laugh beside me, I give him a leveled glare, "Yes, there have been improvements, Hopper, however, there are some who should stay with their cannons and such" Mike explains.

Hopper nods his head slowly, while I roll my eyes at Mike's honesty. I let out a sigh, "Yes, Mike is correct, there are definitely some who should *just* man the cannons and let the hands on combat be for those who are better trained" I admit.

Hopper chuckles lowly, "Good to hear", he comments, and he turns his head to look to his left, out to the blue, sparkling water. Mike and I can't help but follow his gaze.

"It'll be soon, very soon" Hopper comments, as he moves towards the railing, Mike and I silently follow. We stand silently next to one another, the breeze billowing around us, as loose pieces of my hair fly freely in the wind.

"Feel that" Hopper says quietly. I take in his words and attempt to feel something more different than usual. I close my eyes in concentration.

After a few moments, I allow my body to feel the difference in the air. It's electrifying, suffocating almost.

"It's...almost electrical" Mike speaks my words for me, and I turn

towards him. Hopper nods his head in agreeance, "This is how the air felt last time. Thick and electrifying, we're close" Hopper lowers his head.

I take in a long breath of air and let it out slowly from my nose. Willing the anticipation to leave my body. *It won't be long*, my mind wanders just a bit.

We stay there, together, in this moment, as we embrace the change of the wind, along with the looming threat that comes along with it.

A couple of days later, as Hopper has placed the feeling of change upon me, I can feel the air thicken and change each and every day, and I can't help but let my stomach knot.

Today, it is quiet on deck. It seems as if everyone has felt the change around them, and they too are assessing the next steps that will be coming, awaiting the uncertainty that follows.

Since there is not much for us to do, and we are all free, we've come to sit in our old foretop together. A rare occurrence for us nowadays.

I can tell the other boys and Max have felt the change too, especially Max, who has been to this island before. I'm sure it brings back her haunting memories, but if it does, she doesn't say anything to us.

"Do you remember our first day up here?" Dustin's mellow voice breaks our silence. We all turn our gazes towards the curly haired boy.

He's casting a look around, willing us to remember our first days upon the *Hawk*. The boys aren't grabbing, but I take the offer, "I do" I whisper, my eyes cast down as I play with my drawstrings in my lap.

I can feel the rest of their eyes on me, waiting for me to say anything else. So, I look up and meet each of their variety of eyes and give them a wide smile.

"I remember how scared I was. How I was so afraid of being found out", I admit to the small group, as I look back down, continuing to play with my strings.

I hear Mike chuckle next to me, "Yeah, I remember meeting all you guys, and when we all still thought El was a boy", he gives me a toothy grin, that I can't help but return.

Lucas pipes in, "That's right, you had us going for a couple of years, which, is pretty impressive in my book", he shrugs his shoulders.

"Do you know how hard it was to keep that secret from all of you, especially since I knew?" Will asks the boys.

Dustin shakes his head, "I wouldn't have been able to keep it secret, not good with that sort of thing", he waves his hands in front of him.

Max rolls her eyes, "Dustin, obviously you can because you haven't said anything to anyone else about El, or me either" she says a bit harsh.

"Well, I'm just saying that if I were in Will's position, I think I would have blabbed sooner rather than later", he shrugs his shoulders.

Max lets out a frustrated groan and we all chuckle, and soon silence falls upon us again, until Dustin speaks up loudly, "Hey!" he exclaims, and we all jump at his loudness.

"Dustin, seriously, we're right here" Max seethes at him. But the boy only points at Max, "When we get back to Florida, she's got to get a tattoo and a piercing" he waggled his eyebrows at the redheaded girl.

Max mouth drops open suddenly, "What, no way, we've already been over this!" she pulls away and crosses her arms over her chest. Lucas jumps in, "No, you said you might, but, you've *got* to now, you're apart of our group", he states.

Max rolls her eyes, "I honestly don't feel like getting poked and prodded just to add a mark to my skin" she sighs. I place a gentle hand on her shoulder, "It's not that bad Max, maybe we'll start you off with a piercing first, it's not bad" I state.

However, Dustin barges in, "No. She's got to get the tattoo first, like we did, then the piercing" he argues.

I roll my eyes at him this time, "Dustin, it doesn't matter, we'll let

Max decide" I rub her shoulder and she gives me a smile.

"Thanks El, at least someone is on my side for letting me make my own decisions" she gives a glare to the other boys.

I laugh and she looks at me, "What?" she asks bemused. I shake my head at her, "Max, I didn't say you had a *choice*, you're getting the tattoo and piercing, I just said you can choose which one first" I smile wickedly at her. The boys roar with laughter, as I watch Max's eyes widen in fear. She smacks my hand from my shoulder and I can't help but join in with the boys.

"Ugh, you guys are awful!" Max exclaims as she buries her head into her knees.

I can't help but revel in the laughter that surrounds us. Although, we don't fit as nicely as we once did in the foretop, thanks to our growing height and adding Max to the group, the foretop is much more crowded.

But what I marvel at is the way our laughter surrounds us. And I can't help but bathe in the sound, for I honestly cannot remember the last time we all laughed up here, this loudly together. And I can't help but let my mind take that one step into dark thoughts that this could be our last.

However, I quickly shake those thoughts from my mind, and bring myself into this moment we share together. I hold onto each of my friend's laughter, carving their uniqueness into my brain and I hold it dearly to my heart.

Night swept over us quickly as we crept into our hammocks for the night. Decidedly, I lay my head in the same direction that Mike does. This action surprises him a bit as I feel him stiffen next to me.

I casually glance over in the darkness and can see the whiteness in his eyes. I see them silently asking, "*Are you sure?*", in which I give him a small smile, a quick peck on his lips, as I settle into his chest.

I feel Mike's long and strong arms wrap around me as we settle into

our hammock together. We allow sleep to grab ahold of us, as our dreams take us.

It doesn't feel like we've been sleeping long when I hear a long low whistle scream across the ship. At first, I don't react to the sound, however, the shrill comes again, and then once more, as five long bells toll out as well.

At this, I spring up, out of Mike's arms, and he's doing the same. We scramble out of our hammocks as fast as possible. The other crew members are doing the same, along with the rest of our friends.

My mind attempts to assess what is going on around me, it's dark, but not the darkness that holds onto the night, it's a darkness in which I have never seen before.

We rush up on deck, as feet hammer behind us up the wooden steps of the ship. We run to the railings of the ship, as we brace ourselves against the now raging waves.

I take a moment to look around me and notice that the sky is no longer the clear, sweet blue that had followed us almost the whole way. But now, the sky was a dark grey, almost black in color. The clouds were angry and wide, as thunder growled in the distance.

The ocean matched the angry sky, no more a crystal blue and calming waves, but loud crashing waves, that were as dark as the night.

We all held on dearly, as the *Hawk* attempted to ride the aggressive waves. I felt something wet hit my brow, and I slowly reach up to wipe away the wetness. I bring my hand down to the front of my face and rub the wetness in my hand. I cast my eyes upward and watch as the small, cold raindrops begin to fall steadily.

"Alright crew!" Hopper's booming voice comes across the ship, we all turn to his voice. "We're here, that means...it's time!" he roars, as he throws his fist into the air.

The rest of us still a little startled from the quick onset of the island, take a moment to take everything in, that this is the moment where,

we fight.

I take in a deep breath, attempting to steady myself. Although delayed, other voices of the sailors around us begin to sound out, answering Hopper's cry.

Then, there is movement. Everyone moves in steady paces, as they move to where they are meant to be at this exact moment. Ever since Hopper had explained the new plan to us, we had rehearsed the movements a hand full of times, till we had it down pact.

However, I found myself rooted to my sport, my brain unable to remember what I was supposed to do. But then, a gentle hand finds my shoulder, and I turn wide eyed to the source, and relief washes through me when I see Mike's calming presence by my side.

He nods his head towards the others, "Come on, El, we've got to get ready", he states with a quiet voice. And just that pulls me back, I nod my head, and move with him to follow the others.

We hastily head back down to our quarters, where every person is hustling to put away their hammocks. We then rush to our seabags where we pull on our sailor gear. Although, I find it silly to have to dress for this kind of occasion, I am thankful that the clothing is tighter to my body, so I don't have to worry about my looser clothing getting caught on anything.

Once we are rigged out, we all stand together, our looks a bit more wilder as normal, since we feel the rush of adrenaline pulse through our veins.

We stand in a circle, and I'm the first to push my tanned hand into the middle, Mike follows after, and then the rest of the boys and Max stack them on top of ours.

I look at them and let out a long breath, "Promise, everyone, that we will all stay safe. That if we see someone in trouble, we help them" I say as steadily as possible, although I know I'm shaking with anticipation.

Everyone returns a steady nod, as they all recite, "Promise" as well.

We break away slowly, and the group begins to disperse. Lucas and Dustin head off to their slated spots, while Max and Will head towards the cannons.

I'm so thankful in this moment that Mike and I will be together through this. I go to move, but Mike catches my arm quickly and pulls to a dark corner of the ship. Before I can ask what he is doing, his warm lips find mine.

I can't help but melt into his embrace, as I wrap my arms tightly around his neck, pulling him as close as possible.

We pour our emotions and feelings into the depth of the kiss, of our embrace, as we move against one another. Although, too soon, we both pull away from one another. Mike rests his forehead on mine.

We stand in silence for a moment, "Remember, after this, we can get married...and find a home...and..." Mike trails off, I can feel his racing heartbeat against my own rib cage. I know he's just as scared as I am.

I let out a shaky breath, "Yes. We will be together, and everything will be fine" I nod against him, as our brown eyes meet.

I can feel Mike's eyes trying to take all of me in, memorizing each line, each formation of my face, as I am doing the same with his.

"I love you, El" Mike whispers, oh so quietly. I have to fight back my impending tears as I try to not let them spill across my cheeks, "I love you too, Mike", I get out and before he moves away, I pull him back into another sweet kiss.

We finally break apart, and he nods his head, and whispers, "Okay", he pulls on my hand and leads us up to the deck.

He gently lets my hand go at the last step, I immediately miss his warmth and contact. But, I bring myself together, knowing that I need to be focused, I need to be ready for what's coming.

I follow Mike to the railing where Finny and his other, not so small, friends stand. They turn their heads at our approach. I observe that they are trying to keep themselves together as well, but their eyes

betray them, and show the fear that they hold.

I place a gentle hand on Finny and Lonnie's shoulders. Their small hands find mine as they link them together. Mike does the same with Murray and Benjy. We stand solemnly as we cast our eyes out to the churning sea.

The other ships have come closer to ours, as we begin to form the 'original' formation in which was decided upon. We have to wait till we are closer to the island to instigate our 'new' formation, decided upon by the mutiny group.

In the not so far away distance, I finally spot the island, which is much larger than I had imagined, and my eyes widen at the sight.

Since the waves are so chaotic, it takes longer to approach the island, however, even though the crawl is slow, my heart races as the island becomes more distinguishable.

There are churning whirlpools making their appearance as well. And our crew mates have to steadily and skillfully maneuver the *Hawk* around them.

What feels like hours, the island finally comes within our sights. However, it seems eerily calm. I draw my cutlass from my side and I instruct the young boys and Mike to do the same.

The rain and wind now pounds down on us, and we are drenched to the bone, I feel myself shiver at the cold, but keep my mind on the island.

I take a chance and look towards Hopper, who is at the head of the helm, his hands are clasped together behind his back. His gaze steady. I let myself relax a bit at his calm demeanor.

But, then his body changes as he moves forward with haste, his eyes widening. I furrow my brow in confusion, I cast my eyes back to the island, watching to see what Hopper is looking at. However, a long, scornful cry pierces the air. And there's silence around us.

Another cry is heard further off, I whip my head to the sound, and my eyes lock onto the ship closest to us, and that's when I hear the

cry of man, who sounds like they are being ripped to shreds pierce across the ocean.

I can hear my heartbeat in my ears. Again, a shrill cry comes out, but this time it seems much closer, *too* close.

I turn around slowly to the shouts and screams of men on our ship. Another screech, and a cry of, "Attack!" below behind me.

I find myself face to face with the faceless monster that had tried to kill Will and I, so many years ago.

The monster slowly approaches me, it's long, gangly arms, that are covered with an unpleasant goo, rises above my head. I'm frozen in my spot, my heart is in my throat, it swings it's bared claws at me, and a shrill cry fills the deck of the *Hawk*. I can't breath.

Oh boy, I'm sure you guys hate how long I'm taking to update, and I seriously hate it too. Just had a lot of stuff going on and went away for the weekend, my niece had AAU tournaments in Old Orchard, so it was nice to get away for the weekend. And I'm happy to finally have time to write again.

And the cliffhanger....hahaha...hope you guys liked this chapter. It was hard to write because it was kind of the filler, where the action starts, but doesn't hit all at once. So, next chapter will be the full battle scene! Yay! Getting closer!

Let me know what you think! And maybe I will have another chapter up by the end of the week! But, PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE review! As other authors know they are the fuel to these stories! Thanks for reading!

28. The Shadow

You all are truly amazing and wonderful! Thank you for the reviews, and kind words, they are truly appreciated and I love every, single, one! And I'm glad you guys liked this last chapter because I was struggling to get through it.

So, now we are on to the long awaited battle...let's see what happens!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack.

El's point of view:

I can't breathe.

And at this very moment, I believed that it was because the monster decided to rip my body to shreds, my insides spilling out onto the deck. And allowing the darkness to take me.

However, although, there is a moment of darkness that surrounds me, I find that my body is intact and well. And I can't breathe because I'm being pressed to the deck by a larger body than mine, in which I can immediately place as Mike's.

My eyes widen at our situation, as I'm slightly disoriented from the impact of Mike's body roughly pushing me out of the way of the dreaded monster, and onto the not too soft deck.

Mike's warm breathe comes in and out onto my face quickly. Through his shaggy black hair, our eyes meet, and I can tell he's scared out of his mind.

"El!", he lets out quickly, "Are you okay?" his eyes scan me wildly. I can only nod slowly, as my lungs allow in a deep breath to replace the hard air that was knocked from my lungs.

Knowing the situation is dire, Mike climbs off of me quickly, and pulls me to my feet. I take in my surroundings quickly, and my eyes quickly spot the monster, that should have been my ultimate downfall if it weren't for Mike's lightning reflexes, is now being

hacked to pieces itself by Jonathan and Steve who have cornered the beast.

It lets out a pitiful cry as it crumbles to the deck in a bloody mess. Jonathan and Steve don't celebrate the one kill, as they turn towards us with wild eyes, they approach us.

"You okay El?" Jonathan asks, blood is spattered across his once white uniform. I nod my head slowly. Jonathan lets out a relieved breathe, "Good, but El, you've got to get your head into this, you're one of the best swordsmen on the ship, we need your skills" he stresses.

I take in his warm glance as he places a gentle hand on my shoulder. His words course through me, and I mentally scold myself. I've been worrying about this battle, this moment, for far too long. That I've allowed it to affect my fighting, and I can't let that happen.

Worse, I can't allow Mike to constantly have to worry about me getting hurt, or else it might be him getting hurt to protect me.

I swallow my fear, my anxiety that I've been building, and I let my body finally relax. I narrow my eyes, "Let's do this" I say quietly, and I watch each of the boys allow a smile on their faces, nodding in agreement.

Steve and Jonathan retake their positions, and I turn to Mike, he's giving me a confused look. "Mike, thank you for saving me, I promise, I won't freeze like that again" I say to him.

Mike shakes his head, "My body reacted faster than I knew it could" he chuckles a little. "When I saw that beast swinging its hand towards you, all I could think was 'protect'" he says earnestly.

I give him a warm look, "I don't know what I would do without you" I admit to him and he smiles in return.

"Let's get ready for Hopper's orders", Mike suggests as we move to our positions.

We rush to the railings of the ship and line up with the other men, cutlasses in hand. I scan the ocean eagerly, it seems that the other

ships that are with the mutiny have recovered from the small barrage of monster's.

It seems as if they were just testing us. To see if we were worth the fight.

We are gaining ground on the island now, it will be a matter of moments before the mutiny begins.

I go over the plan in my mind quickly. The original plan of attack had every ship circling the island, however, it was under strict orders that no one, *no one*, was to disembark from their vessel's. But, with Max's information, it made sense that some had to go on land, where we would set explosives around the queen. For, as Max explained, it seemed that the queen was fairly immobile, and that our stream of attack would need to be quick.

There were numerous ships that would turn just right, to line up their cannons, in which they would use to clear a line straight to the queen. Then, as fast as possible, the land crew would get to safety, as every ship in the barrage would fire down on the queen, rendering her helpless, and hopefully putting an end to this nightmare.

We just have to hope and pray that the ship's who are not apart of the mutiny join in, or understand the true danger of them not following. My heart is against my chest in anticipation. However, I draw my thoughts into the now, and focus on what is about to come.

The ocean is quiet once again. And I can't help but feel that it isn't right, the silence. My senses are on high alert. And it seems as if any small movement or sound, my body tightens in reaction.

We are only about 300 feet from the island now. And I know Hopper will be giving the orders soon.

However, it seems like everything happens all at once, and the silence that we were wrapped in breaks, as a terrifying bout of screaming breaks out all around us.

My eyes widen as I see multiple ships around us seemingly being sucked into the dark depths of the unforgiving ocean, as giant

whirlpools appear faster than normal. And I have to believe what we are up against is anything but normal.

In a blink of an eye, my mouth opens in shock as six ships of our armada are swept up by the whirlpools. I can hear the shouts and screams of terror of the men aboard these ships are caught in their graves faster than they ever imagined.

My heart continues to race, watching the ships disappear one by one. I bend over the railings, desperately searching for a deadly whirlpool beneath us that intends to bring us to our deaths, but it never comes.

I turn to face my other ship mates, and I can tell by their ghostly white faces that they are just as terrified to be ripped to shreds in a matter of seconds.

"Hold steady!" Hopper's voice brings me back to reality. And I have to remember where I am, and what I need to be focusing on.

I grip my cutlass until my knuckles turn white, and I put myself at the ready. From the corner of my eyes, I can see the rest of the men around me doing the same.

200 feet now, I gaze back down to the ocean, we should be close to the shoreline, meaning that we cannot get much closer without scraping the bottom of the ship. However, the ocean is so dark and muddled, it's impossible to see if the bottom is coming up soon.

But, as we approach the island, I notice something against the white sand of the shore, it almost seems as if it is moving. I squint my eyes to make sure I am not seeing things.

Max stands near me, she whispers into my ear, "Do you see that", he voice is quick and shaken. "That's exactly what happened bef-" but Max is unable to finish her sentence as the ship is beginning to shake violently.

I grasp onto the railing with my empty hand to steady myself. Some men around me are fast enough to do the same. However, there's a group who are not fast enough and fall to the deck with a groan.

The shaking stops as suddenly as it starts, "What was that?" I ask

breathlessly, turning my head to Max. But her blue eyes widen, and I watch her swallow slowly, she only points ahead of me.

At her movement, I turn my head steadily back around in confusion, but that is quickly erased as I watch the white sand on the beach, shift and shake violently.

Gasps let loose around me, but I stay silent, watching intently on what is unfolding on shore. Another violent shake rumbles across the ocean, shaking the poor *Hawk* once again. However, this time the sand begins to move nimbly, as it snakes upwards.

I gaze in amazement as I watch the island sand change. The movements are fluid and mesmerizing. The sand twists and turns together. Growing longer as they spiral towards the sky.

My eyes follow the hypnotic movements of the sand, and soon, I am tipping my head back as the sand's height surpasses that of the *Hawk*, dwarfing the ship.

Then, it begins to shape, as it nimbly comes together. The form thickens and darkens as the sand sticks together, almost like a giant sand castle.

However, this shape seems eerily familiar, and a cold shiver runs up my spine. Everyone, including the other ships around us, are silent, watching the mysterious figure take shape.

After what seems like a lifetime of waiting, the sand pulls together tightly. And the form is complete.

It stands in silence, unmoving. We are all anticipating its next movement.

When, finally, the sand stops moving. I grip my cutlass even harder. And in one fluid motion the sand crumbles and falls away from the figure. Almost like a cocoon, the sand washes away, but leaves a new being in its wake.

And the final form is a large, dark figure that stands at least forty feet tall in its wake. It slowly begins timid movements, as it spreads its spider like arms out, and they shudder against the earth.

The form is completely black, like a gigantic shadow, with no form to call its own. It's head has no face, no eyes, no nothing. And its appearance is frightening.

I feel a hand on my shoulder, I glance over to the owner. Max's face is as white as our sails, and she shakes her head, "This...this isn't the monster from last time" she panics.

I'm at a loss for words as I shake my head dumbfoundedly, "What do you mean?" I ask strained.

Her mouth opens and closes, she can blink quickly, "That's not what I saw before. Last time, it was like that creature that attacked you moments ago, just bigger, this is...this isn't it", she finishes.

I turn back to the creature and swallow. And I begin to think, "*Will our plan even work?*"

My head turns to spot Hopper, however, instead of confusion that I was sure would be plastered to his face, I see fierce determination, and a small smile instead.

The look calms me, just a bit. As if he can feel my eyes on him, he turns his head just enough to where we lock eyes with one another. He gives me a quaint nod, and then he gazes back to the monster.

"Alright lads. Now is the time, initiate plan b!" he shouts across the ship. And even though there is a slight hesitation from the crew members, movement begins to stir on the deck.

I stay in my position, for I am part of the crew that will embark on shore, and I need to be as close to the row boats as possible. However, my eyes fall on Jonathan, who is moving back towards Hopper and the very back of the ship.

Jonathan is at the stern of the ship, where a small cannon lies. Jonathan holds a small bag in his arms, in which he pours a red powder into the mouth of the cannon. He swivels it back, pointing it towards the ocean. He takes a botefeu and holds it to the fuse of the cannon, a loud 'boom' is heard across the deck.

I look back towards Jonathan, where a billowing cloud of red smoke

surrounds him. He is quick with his movements as he loads the cannon swiftly once again, and fires. He does this once more mere moments after.

The three red clouds that trail behind us is the signal to the other ships that have decided upon mutiny, and that the plan is about to commence.

Jonathan then moves back down to his original post, dropping the bag of red gunpowder to his feet.

I turn and watch as the ships who are apart of our plan, move deftly behind us, and come up on us fast. The battle is now to begin.

I watch hesitantly at the rest of the twenty or so ships, who are sticking with the original plan, as they begin to circle the island instead. However, since there are more ships apart of the mutiny, there becomes a gap in the plan, leaving the rest of the ships much more vulnerable.

Through a loud speaking trumpet I hear from one of the ships, "What is going on?!" although it is muffled, it's plain as day that they have realized, something has changed.

I hear Hopper with his own horn to his mouth bellow back, "It's called, taking charge and actually winning!" he cries out.

Hopper pulls the trumpet away from his mouth laughing. The ships who are apart of our mutiny have come to line up next to us, loud cheers echo across each deck. The two mightiest ships come up to each of our sides. Each Captain with wide smirks placed upon their faces.

"Ready?" the Captain of the *Rebel* shouts across to us. Hopper nods in return. The Captain of the *Rebel* chuckles loudly, "Alrighty boys, here we go!", he pounds his fist into the air and a roar of cheering surrounds us.

And soon, every ship, including the *Hawk* has raised hands, and every men roaring across the decks. With thirty something vessels, the roars become a uniform battle cry, and the sound weaves its way into my

bones. The hope and courage that the other men pour out, surge through me, and I finally feel ready.

"Commence, now!" Hopper bellows, and we leap into action.

In one swift movement, I place my hand on the railing of the ship and leap over the side. I land nimbly into the row boat, and ten other men follow hastily behind me.

Once we are loaded one of the sailors bellows up, "All clear!", and the sailor aboard takes ahold of the line holding the row boat to the ship, as he skillfully lowers us to the water.

We each take our positions at a paddle, and we begin to row with all our might.

As if on cue, the shadow monster that stands before us moves as well. As I attempt to breath steadily as I urge my muscles to row against the raging sea, I watch the monster pound three of its large spider like limbs onto the beach.

The sand beneath its legs begin to swirl into a vortex. And soon, the large faceless monsters that attacked Will and I emerge from the beach as they charge forward.

The monster continues to do this, as it releases thirty or so monsters upon us. However, I blink quickly as it seems as if the monsters disappear the moment they touch the water.

But the cries from the ships around us make this a reality. I continue to row, as I cast my head over my shoulder to see the dreaded monsters have somehow transported onto the ships. I growl in frustration at the powers these monsters seem to have.

As we grunt and pull, rowing into shore, there are many other row boats from the other ships that glide beside us.

They are filled with half of the men, such as ours, so that we may carry as much firearms and gunpowder as we can.

The shore is close at hand, but so is the monster, and I can feel the chill creep up my spine once again. Believing that the monster can

only summon other smaller monsters is a bad belief, for as we approach the shore, there are other row boats that beat us there.

I watch as the men disembark their small vessels, grabbing guns and small cannons, and aiming them at the beast. The men are full of courage and belief as they begin to reign fire upon the shadow monster.

I grin, as I watch the shadow monster stumble back, not having really anything to block the attacks. The men onshore are cheering. As the firing succumbs a bit as the men reload their weapons, I watch in horror as the shadow monster raises one of its legs high into the air, as it swiftly brings it down on the men, who do not see the attack coming.

There is a sickening sound as the row boat shatters, and the men who did not move out of the monsters way fast enough shriek and cry as they are mercilessly killed in one swing.

I can't help the knot that begins to form in my stomach tightens having just watched about five men die right before my eyes in a bloody cloud.

Although my arms are continuing the motion of rowing, I barely notice that we are coming up on the shore, as we crash into it roughly, my body rocking forward violently.

I cringe at the impact, but bring myself to the plan at hand. I let go of my paddle and turn towards Mike, who has lifted one of the gun barrels, with ease, upon his back. He gives me a quick wink, as I follow him.

I jog beside as we approach the shadow monster, we are lucky to have approached his left side, versus the front, because right now the gigantic beast has its attention on the men in front and not its side.

"Now, El!", Mike cries to me, and he stops suddenly, to allow me to break upon the cork at the bottom of the barrel with one swift motion of my cutlass. Black gun powder begins a steady stream from the barrel.

"Go, Mike!" I yell to him as he stumbles forward a bit, the black powder leaving a trail behind him.

I turn back towards my row boat, and assist the other men who are carrying barrels as well. I can't help but watch Mike however, for when he is about twenty feet from the shadow monster, he stops quickly and sets the barrel down on the ground. But, first, he allows the gun powder to pool around the barrel, just so.

Once he is done, he races back to the row boat, to repeat the process.

A loud roaring 'boom' is heard from behind us, and I watch as the shadow monsters is stuck by a cannonball from a far off ship.

The shadow monsters lets out a low roar of pain, as it stumbles from being hit. I whip my head around to look off towards my left, where one of the ships, is still foolhardy following the original plans.

I take in a shaky breath. I can hear cheering coming from the idiotic ship, I could honestly whack each and every one of them for their stupidity. Do they not see that there are people on shore?

As if Hopper reads my thoughts I hear him through his loud trumpet, "What, do you idiots think you are doing!?" he cries out.

Through the trumpet of the other ship, you can hear the cheering even louder, "We're following the *actual* plan, unlike you fools!" the Captain cries. I'm pretty sure I can hear Hopper's eyes rolling from the shore.

Another loud groan from the monster can be heard to my right, I turn my head towards the shadow monster. Even though it has no face, I can tell it's pissed. And now, it's looking straight at us, and the ship that fired upon it.

"Run", is the only word that can pass my lips, I turn towards my rowing crew and yell it once again, "Run!" I bellow, and all eyes fall on me, including Mike's, as everyone drops what they are doing and runs towards me, as I rush towards the small group of trees the island holds.

We move just in time as the shadow monsters slams its mighty legs

onto the spot we were just standing. The impact shakes the ground we stand on, and we are quickly swept off our feet. The row boat splinters into a million pieces behind us.

I feel a sharp sting against my leg, "Gah!" I let out, as I roll over to my back gingerly. My eyes go wide in fear as I see a long slender piece of wood has pierced into my calf.

The blood pools from the wound slowly, and I can't move, frozen by the sight. I hear a muffled, "El!", through my delirium, and then a figure is by my side. Almost as if everything is in slow motion, I turn my head to Mike, whose face is filled with fear, and hair is covered in white sand.

He's talking to me, but I can barely hear him. I watch as he gestures towards my leg, and I only nod at him. He grabs onto the splinter and pulls quickly. I grit my teeth hard as he pulls, a sharp stinging sensations rips through me.

Mike holds the splinter to my face, no longer an old brown color, but instead it is bathed in my rich red blood. I feel as if I'm going to be sick. However, Mike casts the splinter behind him, as he quickly rips at his white sleeve, pulling a long strip of fabric from it. He wraps it gently around my wound three times. The red disappears, and I can breathe once again.

Mike brings a hand to my face, our dark eyes meet, "Are you okay?" I finally can hear him. I swallow a shallow breath, my leg throbs, but it's easy enough to ignore. I give him a small nod.

He whispers an, "Okay", as he stands to his feet, and he reaches to pull me with him.

I scrunch my face a bit in pain, as I gingerly test the weight I can put on my now wounded leg. "We'll get you back to the ship El, we-" Mike tries, but he's cut short by a screeching cry beside us.

A smaller monster, is heading straight for us, and my body reacts faster this time, on its own accord. I draw my cutlass quickly, and move in front of the monster, it was my turn to protect the person I love.

I've noticed, although the monsters are equipped with razor sharp teeth and claws, and they have some speed to them, they are also clumsy. Their sweeping movements knocks them off balance, and their swipes are predictable. I use this knowledge to my advantage, as I nimbly duck the monsters mighty arm, as I am now tucked close to the monster's body.

After feeling afraid all this time, I finally feel calm at the fact of drawing my blade, and being able to beat these monsters at a typical sword fight.

The monster's body is covered in a thick slime, but I ignore this as I side step the monster the best I can due to my injured leg. And just as I predicted, the monster stumbles at its swipe, giving me the momentum to swipe my blade forward, as I sever its left arm.

It lets out a terrible shriek as it collapses to the ground. It's almost black blood splutters from its wound, but I pay no attention, as I swipe my blade once again at its neck.

The monsters head rolls off its shoulders, and its body stops moving as it clammers to the soft sand beneath.

I can finally breathe, I turn towards Mike who has been watching the whole ordeal from the sand. His eyes are wide with, not fear, but admiration. He graces me a smile, as he gets to his feet, "Remind me to never get on your bad side" he jokes, and I roll my eyes at him.

He gestures towards my leg, "We need to get you back to the ship" he says back to being concerned. I shake my head at him, "No. I'm fine, I just took down that monster no problem" I argue.

Mike gives me a hard look, "I don't want you getting even more hurt" he fights back. Knowing we won't get anywhere by fighting, I soften my face, "Mike" is all I have to say softly, and giving him my big brown eyes. And in a moment, he lets out a loud sigh, but nods in defeat. I smile triumphantly.

"Let's help out the others" I say, nodding towards the now fifty something row boats that are scattered about the island.

I hear shriek behind me, and I look towards the idiotic ship. I can see that they are now outnumbered by a group of smaller monsters. I don't feel sorry for them. I look back out towards the ocean, and I feel somewhat relieved to notice, that it seems as if the other ships have joined in our plan.

There are some that are still scattered about, almost unsure as if they want to even join the battle. *Cowards*, crosses my mind, as we move towards the other row boats.

The nearest row boat happens to be the one Will and Max inhabited. They are drenched in sweat from loading and moving the barrels of powder.

"How are you guys doing?" I ask them quickly. Max shrugs her shoulders, "Oh you know, just trying to not die" she says nonchalantly, and even the given situation I can't help but chuckle.

"What can we help with?" Mike asks, his eyes wild. "It'd be helpful if you guys could keep the smaller monsters at bay while we transport the barrels" Will comments.

I turn towards the shore, I can see that the shadow monster seems to have left a large group of monsters on the shore now, although it is continuously sending them to the ships as well. Men from each and every ship are parrying and attempting to keep the smaller monsters at bay, while the barrel groups continue to try to continue on with the plan.

I cast a look at Mike, who gives me a nod, "We're on it" I say, as I draw my blade, and wait for Will and Max to ready their next barrel.

Will being on the smaller side, is being assisted by Max carrying each barrel towards the shadow monster.

There are less barrels surrounding the beast than I would like, but we have to keep trying until the circle is complete.

Even though the shadow monster is different than the queen Max had described, there are similarities in which she explained. This includes the fact that the monster can barely move. The island is so small that

the shadow monster engulfs the whole thing. Making it an easy target.

The overall plan is to surround the monster in gunpowder and barrels, and releasing a final barrage on the beast once the plan is complete. However, we are not even half way into finishing the plan by any means. And the shadow monster has destroyed a good amount of the row boats.

But, I push forward and Mike and I each guard either Max or Will. They pop the cork from the barrel as they charge forward as quickly as they can.

We follow hastily by them, I'm limping slightly on my left leg, but I ignore the pain as the adrenaline of the battle pumps through my veins.

"To your right!" Mike hollers, and I turn, and sure enough a monster is charging at us. I move away from Will and Max to draw the beast away, and thankfully it comes at me.

This monster pounces at me instead of rearing back one of its arms to swipe. I get low to the ground and dive beneath it. The loose sand around me explodes into my face. I shut my eyes tightly so that the sand does not get into my eyes.

I push myself off the sand, and turn towards the monster, it has slid a good ways from trying to pounce on me, and I take the advantage as I swipe my cutlass at its feet. It screeches as I make impact. It fumbles to the soft ground, as I pound my blade into its chest, where I'm assuming it's beating heart lies.

It lets out a high pitched shriek, but it topples to the ground, unmoving. I continue forward. I cast my eyes to the left where I see Mike is effortlessly parrying a monster himself. He spins away from its swipe, and he whips himself around, his blade quick and true, the monster's head tumbles away.

Once he is finished he jogs to meet back up with us. "Nice form" I compliment him. He only shrugs and smiles in return.

Will and Max are huffing between us as they carry the barrel between them. I can tell they are tired from the exerted effort.

As we are nearing the drop point, a monster springs forward unexpectedly, I dodge out of the way on instinct, however, in my speedy movements I forget who is behind me.

I move my body in just the right amount of time that I'm able to watch in horror as the monster lands right on top of Max, sending her, Will and the barrel scattering into the air.

I push my body to move as fast as I am possible, moving past the pain in my leg so that I am able to assist Max.

The monster looms over Max, its large body shadowing hers, I watch it swipe, and I hear a gut curdling scream from Max. I scream as I charge at the dreaded monster. My sound must have startled it, because it turns its head towards me, which is a mistake to it. For, in one swoop of my cutlass, its head slides from its body flying off into the sand. The monster's body crumbles on top of Max.

I can hear Max's cries from beneath the monster as I desperately try to pull the slimy body from her. Thankfully, Mike and Will come to my assistance. "Come on, we've got to get it off of her!", I cry, I can feel the tears pricking at the corner of my eyes.

The boys and I attempt to grib the grimy body the best we can, and with some finagling, we finally succeed in pushing the disgusting monster off of Max.

Once Max is free from the monsters entrapment, we each come to our knees at her side. Max's hands find her stomach as she holds onto it for dear life. She's crying.

"It hurts!", she yells, as he back arches, and her legs contort beneath her. I place a firm hand on her legs and chest, and Will follows my movements. "Max, you've got to stay still!" I cry to her through her screams.

Her breathes are coming in and out quickly, as she rasps for air through her pain. I watch as hot tears stream down her face. "Mike,

come over here", I gesture to the boy. Mike scrambles from Will's side, and I move my hands, his taking their place.

I move my hands over Max's arms that are gripping to herself as firm as possible. "Max. I'm going to have to see the wound", I say to her steadily.

"Ugh, it hurts!" she continues to cry. I let out a shuddering breath as I reach forward and tentatively remove her arms from her stomach. I catch myself from reacting, no matter how badly I want to.

I take in a deep breath and hold it tight as I gingerly lift her now very bloody shirt. I pull it up her waist, and refrain from gasping. There, layed very neatly across Max's abdomen are three deep cuts grazed across her white skin.

There is one right at the base of her stomach, one placed near her lower regions, and one just above the middle mark. They are bleeding steadily, and I'm afraid to say anything, not being a doctor of any sort, so I lie.

"I-I-It's going to be okay Max, don't worry", I try to express that she's going to be okay as smoothly as possible, but I'm barely convincing myself.

Before I can even say something, Will removes his hands from Max, and he whips off his shirt, he pushes it towards me, "Use this, we've got to get her back on that ship, now!" Will says with haste.

I merely nod my head, and get to work. I have Will and Mike help me lift Max as gently as possible, as I maneuver Will's shirt underneath her. Max hollers in pain.

"Shh, Max it's okay, you're going to be okay", I try to soothe her, but she continues to writhe in agony.

I makeshift the shirt into a semi-workable bandage that will help attempt to keep her blood in, I can only hope. I tie Will's shirt tight around her, and she groans. "Sorry, Max" I whimper as I pull at the knot again. One thing I did learn from some of our lessons with Mr. Clark, is that if someone is bleeding, to try to keep the wound

fastened. And I can only hope and pray it's true for stomach wounds.

Once I have Will's shirt secured to Max, I nod to the boys, who back off a bit. Max's breathing is still coming hard and fast, but she's not panicking as much, and I fear she is blacking out from the blood loss.

I pat back her loose hair from her cap, even though I'm smearing her own blood into her already red hair. "Max?", I try to get her attention, but she blearily blinks her eyes, and they roll to the back of her head.

I give the boys a look, "We, need to get her onto the *Hawk*, *now!*" I command to the two boys. And they waste no time, as they both go to scoop her up, so that they can both carry the poor girl.

"You two carry, I'll protect" I direct them, and soon we are off, attempting to get to the nearest row boat.

I turn towards the shadow monster, that seems to have grown in frustration, for it is releasing monsters by the armful, and three are rapidly approaching us.

Mike and Will stop, "El!" Mike cries, giving me a strained look, but I shake my head, "No, go, get Max back to the ship!", I command. I see Mike hesitate, but I give him a stern look, he finally gives in, but not before balancing Max just right so he can reach his cutlass. He takes it from his holster and tosses it to me.

"You'll need two", he directs, and I give him a quick nod, and with one last look, he and Will are off.

I swing Mike's blade within my left hand, it's presence somewhat foreign to my grip. For, I have fought with two swords on numerous occasions, but it is not my typical fighting style.

However, Mike's cutlass is similar to mine, and for some reason, just knowing it's Mike's blade, gives me a whole new feeling: invincible.

I turn my body, readying myself for the monsters impending impact. I flip both cutlasses within each hand skillfully, getting ready for the first swipe.

I watch as one monster pulls ahead as it leaps towards me, both hands out, its sharp nails poised for kill. I smirk at its cockiness, if it can even feel that emotion. And I step forward, moving slightly to the left, as I swipe at its chest as it passes by.

Its shriek tells me I hurt it pretty bad. But, I pay no attention to the fallen beast, as the other two approach. I side step and spin past the first, as I duck and stab the next beast right into its gory mouth of razor sharp teeth, it sputters and shrieks.

I pull my blade from the beast, as the last one lunges. This one I play with a bit. My anger and frustration from these beasts finally building to a peak, I want it to feel the pain it has inflicted on me, on my friends.

It moves its long arm towards me, and I use Mike's blade to cut through its thin arm. This monster doesn't shriek, but instead moves again with its other arm. I spin my blade in my hand and dislodge its remaining arm, it flies into the air.

This time the monster growls, but it remains on its feet. Although it does not have arms, it manages to balance itself. "Come on then!" I yell in challenge. And at my command it charges with a shrill cry. I let the monster come straight for me as I place both mine and Mike's blades in a straight fashion. The monster impales itself neatly into the blades.

I hold my ground the best I can in the loose sand beneath my toes. The monster spits and growls into my face, its wide mouth attempting to grab onto me in anyway, but I hold it firm.

Finally, it loses pace and sputters, I pull the blades quickly from the monster. It falls to the ground in defeat. I'm breathing heavily from the exertion, but I keep at it, as more monsters continue towards me.

Mike's Point of View

Every fiber in my body tells me to stay with her. But the look she gives me, that one look of determination and courage tells me that she will be okay, or that I have to believe she can handle herself.

"Mike come on, we've got to get moving!" Will's cry brings me out of my moment of hesitation. Leaving El with my cutlass is the only thing I can do to make sure she's got something of me, where I can at least hope it will protect her, as if I were by her side.

Will and I carry Max the best we can to the nearest row boat, which I'm thankful to see is empty. I turn towards the other seaman, and I'm happy to see they are our own crew members.

They have wide eyes when they see us. "Is the lad okay?" one asks concerned. Will and I lift Max as gently as we can into the row boat, "Don't know, we need to get back to the *Hawk*, now" Will states.

The other seaman nod, as they load into the rowboat as well. One of the men pushes the row boat into the still raging sea. There are four more in the small boat as well who are aggressively rowing against the waves.

Will sits on one of the benches and I turn Max so that her head is on Will's lap, I sit and place her feet in my lap.

It's hard to tell if she's breathing, "Will can you check-" I try, but he's already moving his fingers to place them beneath Max's neck. He waits a moment and then nods, "The pulse is there, but just barely, we'll need to get her to the doctor immediately" he states, his eyes unsure. I only nod at him in return.

The men who are rowing are large, and have thick muscles on their arms, making it seem like they are rowing through the easiest of sea's with no strain at all. We are making quicktime to the *Hawk*.

I turn to look back towards shore, even though I honestly don't want to. My heart sinking I left El there by herself.

We are gaining distance so it's hard to tell who's who on the beach.

We finally approach the *Hawk*, and we gingerly hand Max up the side of the ship. I can hear her small moans of pain.

Will and I follow hastily. Both making sure that Max gets to the sick bay. One of the larger men who could carry Max with ease lays her on one of the operating tables.

Dr. Coleman approaches us quickly, "What happened?" he asks incredulously. In this moment, if it weren't so dire I would have come up with an answer that was sarcastic, but not having the time I explained the attack to the doctor with haste.

"Okay, I'll need to stitch him up, you boys go back on deck, I'll handle it here" he states nodding his head towards the door.

Will and I humbly oblige as we leave the sick bay. Now that Max has been secured my mind goes back to El. I rush towards the side of the ship to get back to the row boat. I didn't care if I would have to row on my own, I wasn't leaving El there.

However, I'm quickly stopped by a large seaman. I give him a quick look, "What are you doing, let me go" I state hastily.

The seaman doesn't budge and scowls, "Captain's given the order to blow that thing up, all the rowboats are back" he states.

My eyes go wide in panic as I turn towards Will, "Where's El, did you see her?" I ask with haste. Will's eyes go wide too, "No I have-" he starts, but then a loud warble echoes across the ship.

I feel my blood run cold, knowing what that whistle means, "Bare arms!" I hear Hopper shout across the deck.

As if everything slows, I turn and watch as every man on the top deck are at the ready to fire their cannons. However, I also know these aren't normal cannonballs being fired, but they will be flaming balls heading towards land, hoping to obliterate the shadow monster, the smaller monsters and the island itself.

My legs move faster than my thoughts, as I race to move towards the back of the ship. I'm running as fast as my legs will move, "NO, WAIT!" I cry out, my voice cracking is desperation.

But then I hear, "FIRE ALL!", and I'm knocked to the ground as every cannon cracks out it's loud roar, sending their flaming cannonballs towards their target. Every other ship in the fleet does so as well. The roar is deafening.

I pull myself to my feet as I rush to the edge of the ship. My eyes scan

the beach wildly when I see her, running desperately towards the edge of the beach, she's almost at the water's edge.

My eyes fill with tears, as I hear the echoing boom, that cascades all around me. I watch the shadow monster and island go up in flames. A cloud of smoke rushes around the island. And I see my El, no more.

El's Point of View

My thoughts and movements are on autopilot, as I hack and slash at every monster that approaches me.

It feels like an infinity of time that I loose all sense of reality.

I don't hear the cries of my shipmates and others that the plan has been completed, that it's time to get to safety.

There's so much chaos around me, everyone is only worrying about themselves. While, I'm worrying about my fate...my feelings of fear that held onto me so long. I want this monster to know the pain and fear I felt.

I'm in a blind fury, that when the monster's stop attacking. I finally stop to take in my surroundings, it's quiet.

I look across the beach and see there is no other person, no other row boat stationed at the shore. Just me and the shadow monster remain.

My breathing is coming hard and fast. I turn to look at the shadow monster, who can now only set its sights on me.

It bows its long black head towards me, and I embrace the worry that washes over me for a brief moment. But then I let it go.

The shadow monster is a foot away from me, and in that moment we are equals. We both don't move, don't breathe, we take in the other.

I'm lost for a moment, when I hear the shrill sound of a whistle, that I know is Hopper's. The sound startles the shadow monster as well, it raises its head, almost as if it's trying to find out where the sound is coming from.

My heart stops for a moment, realizing what that whistle means: explosion.

My brain starts working again, as I turn and run. I throw my arms out hard, willing myself to go faster. Knowing, if I don't make it off this island, I will surely go up in flames with this monster.

But, my thoughts of my future, my promise to Mike, goes through my head like a running waterfall. My eyes begin to blur with the tears that threaten to fall.

The soft and shifty sand is hard to dig my heels into as I run. I'm almost at the shoreline's edge, if I could just make it to the water...

Then, I hear the loud crack and boom of the cannons from all around me. Although, being shot from water, I can feel the shake in the ground beneath me.

I hear the explosion behind me...and before I know it, I'm flying....and then everything is dark.

Oh boy, I know I'm going to get some remarks about this cliffhanger, but it lines up perfectly for the next chapter!

I just have to say again, you are all so amazing with your reviews! I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the reviews I got from the last chapter, because they mean so much to me!

Sorry, I took a little longer with this one, but it had to be just right! I promise I will have the next chapter up soon! I have class this weekend so I won't have as much time. But, maybe if I have time at work.

Again, thank you all for reading, you are all wonderful! And as always PLEASE REVIEW! :)

29. The Aftermath

Once again, you are all awesome with your reviews, and I apologize for the cliffhanger! But, I had to for this next chapter!

So, please enjoy this chapter I hope you all enjoy it!

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things* or *Bloody Jack*.

Mike's Point of View:

My heart is in my throat, and I'm sure it will burst through my chest, as I watch in absolute horror as the island bursts into a magnitude of flame. But, my eyes barely watch the roaring flames because they are on the sight of my El, who has just disappeared in a cloud of thick, black smoke.

"EL!", her name rips from my throat in a loud scratchy proclamation. My body moves on its own accord as I race towards the front of the ship. The other shipman on board have stopped in awe as they watch the island, and monster obliterate into smoke.

My eyes are set on the spot that I watched El disappear. I get to the very front of the ship and lean my body over the railing, the smoke from the blast lingers heavily as it rolls over the waves.

"EL!" I shout again, I can feel the tears pricking at my eyes now. *Why, why didn't she leave!?* Races through my mind, as my head turns this way and that, desperately trying to gain any sight of her.

I hear thundering footsteps behind me, "Mike!", I distinguish Dustin's voice calling my name, my eyes still tracing the waters.

I feel my friends presence near me, "What's going on, where's El?", this time it's Will's voice, and his sounds just as desperate as I feel.

"What's gotten into you boys?" a booming voice behind us, it's Hopper. I turn to face him, my face contorted in anger, "YOU DIDN'T WAIT!" I bellow at him, and he's taken aback by my roar.

He raises his hands in defense, "Whoa, kid, what happened?" he tries

to get an explanation from me. However, my mind is too muddled with fear and uncertainty that my brain sets my anger on the best target: him.

With my growing limbs have allowed me to finally meet Hopper at his level, our eyes even, I glower mine to his.

His face goes to confusion, I raise my hands and shove him roughly. Although, the same height, he's still got a lot more girth to him, so my push barely does anything to him, "YOU ASSHOLE, YOU DIDN'T WAIT FOR EL!" I roar into his face, I watch as my spit flies through the air.

At this Hopper's face goes white, "She's not here?" this he whispers close to my face.

I shake my head, my hair moving wildly about, "NO, SHE WAS ON THE ISLAND WHEN YOU SET OFF THE CANNONS!" I bellow, my eyes going red with anger, I attempt to shove him again.

Hopper stops in his place, and holds my shoulders steady, "Kid, you need to calm down, we'll find her" he says attempting to calm me.

But it's the last thing I can even think of, not knowing if my El is dead or alive, and it's eating me from the inside out.

I'm about to lay out at Hopper once again, when I hear Will speak, "There! She's there, El!" he yells towards us.

I turn so quickly I almost stumble, I push Dustin and Lucas out of the way roughly, to see where Will is pointing. I steady my eyes the best I can to see where he is pointing. Even though the smoke is still thick and black, El's white shirt sticks out against the dark smoke and water.

My body thinks for me. I push myself up over the railing and I jump. I can hear the yells of the guys and Hopper above me as I dive down from the *Hawk*, my thoughts on only one thing: save El.

My body hits the water, hard. As I break the dark surface of the churning sea, my body dives deeper into the depths. The water is cold, but not enough to stop me. I open my eyes underneath the

water, and the salt burns my eyes.

I can't see anything, so I push my arms in an upward motion and I break the surface. The waves slosh around me, knocking me slightly off balance as the cool ocean splashes in my face.

I wipe my mop of curls away from my face, "El!", I call out as I bob at the surface of the water. I whip my head left and right, desperately trying to find El's white body that I saw just moments ago.

Without hesitation I begin to paddle forward. The waves knock me around, but I'm bound and determined, my heart and mind on one goal.

I'm sure I've swallowed about a gallon of salt water as I continue my motions. I feel my body growing tired, but still I pursue.

When, finally, I see her, bobbing in the water, her shirt a ghostly white against the pitch black ocean. My heart leaps when I see her, "El!" I call again, hoping she conscious, I swim towards her with haste.

The waves are determined to keep me away from her, but my determination and love is stronger. I surge forward, and finally I'm within arm's reach of her, I jump towards her.

And finally, finally, my arms find her, and I pull her towards me. "El", I sigh in relief, as I attempt to hug her to me.

I take her in, as I bob to keep us afloat. I push her hair away from her face and see that her eyes are closed, and I panic slightly.

"El, come on El, you've got to be okay", I plead to her as I hold onto her. But, she makes no motion to move and I panic.

"Help!" I yell out to no one in particular, as a wave surges over us. It knocks me under, but I hold firm to my girl.

We resurface and I sputter water from my mouth, I'm desperately trying to keep her head above the water.

I cry out again, "Help, please someone help!", I plead as I look at the

small girl in my arms. My eyes begin to water, "El" I whisper to her.

Another wave crashes into us, and I almost lose my grip on El. I can feel my body beginning to feel weak and tired, and I hold onto El for dear life.

In this moment, I take in everything about her. The way her hair would curl as it got longer, the way her dark eyes matched mine, her beautiful smile.

I sigh to myself, knowing that this could be our last moment together. But, I smile. For, if this is going to be it, then I'm glad we're together and that we will find each other again.

I cling to El as the waves crash over us, and I let them. As long as I have El in my arms, then I am at peace.

A large wave crashes over us. I splutter to the surface, and I choke in a large amount of salt water. I can feel it burning in my lungs, and I accept our fate.

However, I feel a rough pull on the back of my neck, and I grasp onto El even tighter as I feel a choking sensation in my throat as I'm pulled roughly back.

My breath catches in my throat and I'm flying through the air with El in my arms. And I'm thrown roughly onto something hard.

I gasp loudly as I hit the surface. It takes me a moment to realize that El and I are in a boat. I look around quickly to see Hopper, Dustin, Max and Jonathan staring at us.

"You are such an idiot, why would you do that!", Dustin yells at me, his hands thrown wildly into the air.

I'm gasping in air to return the lost presence in my lungs, unable to speak, I only shake my head at the boy.

My attention quickly turns to El, and so does everyone else's. "We...we need...to help" I say through gasps.

And Hopper is the first to react, he pulls El from my lap gently, and

he places her flat against the boat. He bends down and listens to her chest. "She's barely breathing, I'm sure she's got water in her lungs" he announces as he places his hands together over her chest, he begins to push roughly at her.

I watch in shock, unsure as to what to do, "Okay kid, I'm going to...need you to...tilt El's head back...and open her mouth...and breath into her...okay" he says through his pulses on El's chest. I only nod my head and move so that I am on El's right side, I tip her head back, in which she automatically opens her mouth. I wait for Hopper's command.

Hopper stops suddenly, "Now, kid!", he barks at me, and I waist no time as I push two deep breaths into El's mouth.

Still nothing, Hopper goes back to his pulses, "Come on kid, you've got to come through" he pleads. I watch as the older man tries every way possible to make sure El is okay.

He stops, then looks back to me, and with that silent gesture, I know that it's my turn. This time I give her three long breathes, still nothing. I stay close to her head, "Come on El, please" I beg.

But she still doesn't move. Hopper goes at it again. "El", I hear Dustin whisper as we watch Hopper push at her chest. Tears are prickling at my eyes, they burn from the salt water. My heart begins to break.

Hopper stops and turns towards me again. This time with determination, I breath in once, "Come on El", I plead, another breath, "I can't lose you, please", one last breath, "I love you" I whisper, and I place another long deep breath into her lungs.

And just as I raise my head away from El's lips, she follows me, our lips still somewhat together, she splutters water into my mouth, but I pull away, as I allow her to sit up.

I watch in amazement as El begins to cough up what seems like the whole sea onto the deck. She's coughing and spluttering as she desperately tries to get air into her lungs.

She collapses to the side, but I hold onto her, "El!" I cry in

amazement, as I hold her close. I feel her arms come up and wrap around mine, "Mike", she whispers, oh so delicately.

I pull away slightly to look down at her, our eyes meet, I shake my head, "I thought I lost you", I say gently to her. She gives me a slight smile, "I promised...remember", she says to me, and I can't help but pull her into a tight hug, unsure if I was ever going to be willing to let her go again.

I look at everyone again, and they are giving us warm looks. Hopper pats El's legs gently, "Good to have you back, kid", he shakes his head, and I watch in awe as a tear escapes his eyes.

El gives him a warm smile back, "Me too" she whispers and I look down to the beautiful girl in my arms, and I watch her eyes flutter, and finally close.

I panic slightly, but Hopper catches me before I panic too much, "Don't worry kid, she's exhausted".

I nod hesitantly, but I still hold the girl in my arms in a tight embrace as we make our way back to the ship.

El's point of view

My head pounds against my skull, and my limbs feel stiff and achy. I blink in the harsh sunlight as it streams in to wherever I am.

I sit up slightly, and my head spins, I use my right hand to steady myself, willing myself to not fall off the bed I've found myself on.

It takes a moment for me to realize I'm in the sick bay. I look around blearily, and my eyes land on a familiar face, they smile at me.

"Hey, I thought you were dead to the world" Max shoots at me sarcastically. Not feeling up to much I cast her the best glare I can manage, "Can't get rid of me that easily" I say through a scratchy voice, my throat raw.

The room spins again, and I throw both my arms down quickly. I hear Max chuckling, "Don't strain yourself, you've been out for two

days" she remarks.

I whip my head to the redheaded girl, "Two days?!" I exclaim. She nods her head slowly, "Yeah, after they got you back on the ship, you blacked out, the doctor said it was normal given the blast from the explosion, and you had a lot of water in your lungs" she explained.

I take in her words slowly, and one person comes to my mind, "Where's Mike?" I ask hurriedly. And Max shakes her head while scoffing, "You two are awful, he's been here every free moment he's been able to get".

I blush slightly at her words, "He has" I whisper. Max rolls her eyes, "If that boy doesn't love you, then I don't know what love is" she says with a smirk.

We sit in silence for a bit, but then I turn back to her, "How are you doing?" I question. Max shrugs, "It still hurts, but I'll live, and I've got some cool scars out of it", she says nonchalantly.

I chuckle, "So, does that mean you'll get a tattoo then?" I joke. At this Max laughs loudly, but then grabs at her stomach, "Ugh, El, don't make me laugh it hurts" she pleads and I smile at her reaction.

"I think if I can handle a strike from those monster's, I can't believe a tattoo would be worse" she comments.

I laugh at her comment, but find myself still weak, I slowly lower myself back to the cot, I let out a low groan, "Ugh, my head is pounding!" I cry out.

I hear Max scoff, "I'm sure you just need some water, there's some next to you in that basin" she states from across the room.

I turn my body slightly and see an old wooden bucket to my side, a rusty ladle sits inside of it. I hesitantly sit up once again. My hand shakes as it moves towards the ladle. I grab it with a strained effort, and I shakily bring the cold metal to my lips.

The water sloshes as my hand shakes with weakness, it dribbles down the sides of my lips and onto my shirt and pants. However, I don't mind. I drink greedily as the water trickles down my throat, soothing

the rawness.

"Woah, slow down there El, there's plenty of water" Max jokes as I'm reaching into the bucket for another laddlefull in which is just as shaky as the first.

After three helpings of water, I'm feeling a little bit better and I drop the ladle back into the bucket, I lay down again, my eyes growing heavy once again as my weakness overtakes me.

I fight the tiredness, desperately wanting to stay awake incase Mike returns. I'm sure Max senses this as she looks over at me, watching my eyes flutter. "El, just rest. Mike won't be back for awhile, you need all the sleep you can get" she says softly.

I barely register her words as I finally let my exhaustion win over, as the darkness welcomes me once again.

There's a soft murmuring around me. My eyes still feel heavy with sleep, so I leave them closed as I listen to the conversations around me.

"What were you thinking!" the voice is harsh even through a whisper.

"What was I supposed to do, throw her off and leave her to die!" the other voice rougher, I recognize it as Hopper's immediately.

I hear the other voice scoff, I now recognize that it belongs to Dr. Coleman, "It's not just one girl, but two!" he seethes.

Hopper grunts at the older man, "Yeah, two girls who have been nothing but fine sailor's aboard this vessel, El's been with us for years!" Hopper argues.

Dr. Coleman laughs, "It's amazing that they both ended up in the sick bay at the same time. The red head's wounds were so close to her privates, that I noticed pretty quickly. And for El, I had to remove her vest to make sure her lungs were clear. I can tell you I was pretty surprised", he whispers.

I hear quick movements, and I crack one eye open, still attempting to pretend that I am sleeping. I watch as Hopper holds Dr. Coleman by

his lapels and he's holding him in the air. Hopper's face is furious.

"These kids", Hopper gestures with his head to both Max and I, "Helped us in more ways than not, I will not have them thrown off this ship!" he growls into the doctor's face that is riddled with fear.

However, the doctor does not back down, "Be that as it may, Captain, but you know the rules about woman aboard a ship!" he spits into his face.

"How many other girls do you have aboard, hmmm?" Dr. Coleman throws to Hopper, but he only grips the doctor's lapels tighter.

"You whisper one word of this" he threatens, "Or what, you'll have me keelhailed, and for what, may I ask have I done wrong?" Dr. Coleman holds over Hopper.

I can feel my heart pounding against my chest. Hopper knows he cannot just throw a man overboard for no committed crime, it would put Hopper at a deadly place himself. Even though he is the Captain, with no crime committed by the doctor and no trial, Hopper would be looking at a hanging.

Hopper bares his teeth at the doctor, "Is that a threat!" he barks into his face. Although the doctor seems frightened, his face also holds the fact that he has won. "No, Captain Hopper, it is not, however, why don't we let the crew decide these girls fate, and not just you", the doctor says coolly.

Hopper drops Dr. Coleman roughly, and then he points a finger into his face, "You'll see, not one person but you and your superstitions finds these girls a threat" he whispers.

Dr. Coleman meerily shrugs his shoulders, "We will see" he says back, and both men exit the sick bay.

My heart is in my throat. Just that quickly, just like that, after all these years, my secret is out. I open my eyes wide with panic, I attempt to sit up, but the room spins again. I growl in frustration, as I catch myself.

"Easy El, we don't need you blacking out again", Max's voice cuts

through the small bay and I whip my head to her voice.

Her mouth is set in a grim line, I know she heard Dr. Coleman's and Hopper's confrontation as well as I had. Her blue eyes meet my brown, almost asking what our next step will be.

But I have no answer, I'm almost positive that Dr. Coleman has already "let it slip" that Hopper has allowed two woman aboard the ship, and there's going to be a price to pay.

I let out a long sigh. "Don't worry El", I look towards the red head, "You won't be thrown off this ship, everyone loves you" she whispers earnestly.

I truly want to believe her, but my heart isn't sure it can. Knowing that there are horrible stories out there of what men do to women who have stowed away on a ship. A shiver crawls up my spine.

I'm about to open my mouth to speak when suddenly the sick bay door is thrown open so harshly that it is almost thrown off its hinges.

Max and I jump in surprise in our beds, and I cast my eyes over to the person standing in the doorway, and my heart melts.

Mike is looking around frantically, as if he doesn't know where I've been laying for the past few days. His deep brown eyes meet mine, and I can see his are watering with tears.

His smile is all I need as he races towards my bed. Although I know the room will spin, I sit up quickly in my bed, as he envelopes me into his warm embrace, "El!", he cries into my shoulder. And I can't help the tears that shed from my eyes. Relief washing over me knowing that we are both okay, we are both alive.

We hold onto each other for what feels like eternity, until Mike finally pulls back, but only just so he can see me as his eyes greedily take in my face.

He timidly brings up a hand to brush the stray hairs from my face as he tucks them behind my ear. "I was so, so afraid....that I had lost you" he says as another tear leaves his eye.

I shake my head and give him a small smile, "You won't lose me", I say gently to the boy sitting very close to me.

He lets out a shaky laugh, as he brings his head closer to mine, we find each others mouths and press a sweet kiss upon one another. It's slow and tentative at first, as if we are welcoming each other into this space for the first time again.

However, after our latest ordeal, I can't help but reach behind his head, and pull him closer into a searing kiss, in which he happily returns.

We continue on for a moment, until a loud cough fills the room, "Uh, there's other people present you know. You guys can swallow each others tongues later when we aren't here", Dustin's voice breaks us from our moment, although we pull away slowly from one another. Smile's adorning our faces.

"Sorry guys" I whisper, however, it is not heartfelt not feeling truly sorry about reuniting with my love.

Mike shifts so that he can sit behind me, and I lay back against his chest, as he wraps his strong arms around me. I feel so content and warm in this moment, that I close my eyes to take it in.

"Whatever you two, but we've got to discuss what's going on" Dustin says, now more seriously.

I furrow my brows in confusion, "What do you mean?" I ask, however, my gut tells me it already knows what Dustin will talk about.

Lucas and Will stand hesitantly beside Dustin, shifting on their feet. I turn my head slightly to look at Mike, "What's going on?" I ask.

Mike holds me tighter, and he presses a gentle kiss to the side of my head, "They know, the whole crew does", he whispers into my curls, and I feel my heart sink.

"So, it's true then", Max jumps in, worry on her usually calm face. The boys nod in unison, there faces sad and sullen.

"How did it happen so quickly?" I ask, "We *just* heard Hopper and discuss it not moments before you guys barged in" I say, turning my curious eyes on the rest of the boys.

I feel Mike take a deep breath behind me, "It wasn't long after we got you and Max back on board" he stated hesitantly.

A thought pops into my mind suddenly, "Wait!", I cry out turning to look at Mike, and his curious eyes grab ahold of mine, "What about the island?" I question. After all of the laying around and being disoriented, I had totally forgotten about the monsters and island.

However, at this Mike and the boys smile, "We did it, the island was destroyed, along with the monsters" Will perks up.

I allow myself to smile at this news, "So, it worked then?" Lucas nods wildly, "Yeah, after the cannons were fired onto the land, they lit up all of the gun powder and the island went up in flames!" Lucas cried as he threw his hands up in a grand gesture.

I feel Mike flinch a bit at this explanation. I turn to look at him again, he answers me quietly, "You were still on the island when the cannons were fired" he pauses taking in a steady breath. "But, you were running towards the ocean, and then...you were blasted into the air, I thought....I thought you were gone" he squeezes me tightly, in which I return.

I blearily remember the events of what lead to the explosion, the last thing I can truly remember is hearing the whistle across the ocean, then running.

"You were lucky Will spotted you, and then Mike dove into the waters like a crazy person to save you" Dustin said gesturing to the boy behind me.

I give Will a warm smile first, and then I give a quick peck to Mike's cheek, I can feel him blushing beneath my lips. My eyes hold onto each of them, "Thank you...thank you for saving me" I say to all of them sincerely.

They all give small smiles and shrug their shoulders, "If we didn't

save you, I'm pretty sure Mike would have killed the rest of us" Lucas jokes, and the others laugh, but I hear Mike give a low growl behind me. I squeeze his hand in reassurance.

"So, the island, the monsters, they're all just...gone?" I ask. The others nod, "Yeah, once the island exploded, it was like it all just burned into the ocean, weirdly enough" Dustin scrunches his face.

"And all the other monsters on the ships and shore just, vanished" Will stated.

My heart begins to flutter in excitement, knowing that our initial plan had paid off, that it had worked.

"What about the other ships, the ones who didn't participate in the mutiny?" I question. However, at this question, the boys go silent, as they look between one another.

Lucas lets out a sigh, "You see El, that's a whole nother piece to the puzzle that's going on right now" he says quietly.

I give a questioning look, in which Will speaks up, "The Captain's who didn't participate in the mutiny aren't happy with Hopper".

I shake my head, "That doesn't make any sense, there are other Captain's that participated in the mutiny as well" I state matter of factly.

Dustin's mouth pulls to the side, "But, Hopper was the initiator, he's the one who came up with the plan, he's the one who's going to get the bigger consequence" he explains.

My face falls in disbelief, "But, that shouldn't matter, we destroyed the island, the monster's are gone the-" but Lucas cuts me off.

"It doesn't matter, the other Captain's are saying they could have clued them in, that they could have gotten hurt" Lucas explains.

My mouth opens wide in shock, my anger boiling to its limit, "Are you kidding me? They wouldn't even hear Hopper out!" I let out loudly, even though my throat still burns.

Mike squeezes my hand tightly, "El, don't strain yourself, we know this is unfair", he says disdainfully.

"And", Will starts as his eyes meet mine, "And, what?" I ask the boy who's been like my brother. "And, now the crew is whispering things about letting woman on the ship, and it's a huge mess", he says sadly.

At this moment, I honestly have no words. After all this time on the ship, where the crew members knew me as a boy, and who loved me for who I was, all of that changes the moment I become a girl.

"This isn't fair" I say suddenly, all eyes landing on me. "We've got to help Hopper, we've got to explain-" I try, feeling myself getting worked up, but I am interrupted by a low voice.

"And you will, kid", everyone turns their attention back to the door that no one noticed had opened. "There will be a trial in a couple days" Hopper states shrugging his shoulders.

I shake my head, "A trial, what will that help, they will all be against Max and I!" I cry, straining myself, and my head begins to pound.

I bring a hand up to my forehead and wince, "El, you've got to calm down" Mike's soothing voice pours into my ears, and I sit back a bit, attempting to listen to his advice.

Hopper is looking at me, and he gives me a soft smile, "Kid, I hope that over these years I have proven myself a good Captain, and the crew will stand by me. And by you and Max, too. Just because you're woman, doesn't mean you aren't the same two kids who have served on this ship" he smiles warmly at us.

I can't help but feel a little defeated and frustrated. And I know Hopper can sense this as he moves to stand in front of my cot. He bends down enough so that we are eye level.

He pats my shoulder with his large hand, "El, you've one this ship over more time than I can count. If the men aboard this ship are *true* seaman, then they will know this and accept you and Max for who you are" he gives me a reassuring look.

I can only nod at his words lightly as I let them sink in. Hopper gives

me one last grin, as he stands.

"Why don't you boys go and get these girls something to eat, I'm sure they're starving. And you don't need to discuss this matter any more, just relax" Hopper says looking at all the boys and they nod in return. Hopper gives one last wave and he exits through the door.

We all sit in silence for awhile taking everything in, when Dustin speaks up, "Come on guys. Lets get the girls some food and we can eat together" he says moving towards the door.

Lucas and Will follow, but Mike remains stationary. Lucas rolls his eyes, "Come on Mike, she's not going anywhere, we need your help bringing back her food" he states with his arms folded in front of him.

I know Mike is about to argue, so I place a gentle hand on his, he turns to meet eyes, I give him a wistful smile, "Go, you'll be right back, and like Lucas said, I'm not going anywhere".

Mike wants to debate, but I give him a stern look and he sighs, removing himself from behind me. He places a sweet kiss on my unexpected mouth, "I love you" he whispers gently. And I can't help but grin in return, "I love you, too" I say back. And the boys leave the sick bay to retrieve us some food.

I lay back on my cot and let out a long sigh. "Well, that was a lot to take in" Max says from across the room, and I only grunt in return, closing my eyes slightly, waiting for the boys to return.

The boys return soon after carrying old wooden bowls in which they are desperately trying to balance as the soup sloshes about, along with carrying a handful of biscuits.

Max and I accept the soup gratefully as we all down our meals in a comfortable silence. Once I finish my bowl, I lick my lips, the salty remains tart against my tongue. Mike and Will sit comfortably on my cot, while Dustin and Lucas sit on Max's.

Mike holds his hand out for me to take my bowl and I give him a small grin and say "Thanks", as he collects the others.

Soon, night fades over us, and the boys have to leave the sick bay. Each of the boys give Max and I small hugs goodnight and words of relief that we are both okay. Will holds onto me a little tighter, "I'm so relieved that you are okay" he whispers into my ear. I squeeze him tighter, "Me too" I return, as I give him a small peck on his cheek.

Mike is the last to come to my side, and I can tell he doesn't want to leave. He fiddles with my hand in his.

"It's been lonely in the hammock without you", he whispers as he looks up through his dark locks, meeting my eyes.

I chuckle lightly, as I reach forward and move his long hair out of his face, I rest my hand against his cheek. His eyes flutter at the contact, "I know, I miss you too" I say honestly.

He leans into my contact, but even more so as our faces come closer to one another. His lips meet mine with gentle contact. His lips are a little rough, chapped from his days of work on the ship. But, mine still match his perfectly.

We both melt into the kiss, and he pulls me closer to him. He slips his tongue into my open mouth, and I can't help but groan in pleasure.

My hands begin to move, as do his as we deepen the kiss, I'm slowly pulling him back into the cot with me when a loud "Guys, come on!" breaks us apart quickly.

Even though it is now dark in the sick bay, and the only light available is by two melting candles, I can feel my cheeks flushed in embarrassment, and I'm sure Mike's are doing the same.

We are still in each other's embrace as we turn to the source of the frustrated voice. Even in the dim light I can see Max's eyebrows are raised and a cocky smile is painted across her face.

"If you two are going to get it on, then please do so somewhere else, I don't need to see that" she teases.

I silently roll my eyes, and feel my face flush even more, "Max", I groan. And she laughs at our mirth.

Mike lets out a long sigh, "She's right, I've got to go, but I'll be back tomorrow, okay?" Mike says to me, and I merely nod in return.

He gives me another long innocent kiss, which I relish, thinking of how our last one before the battle was almost our last.

I pull him against me into a tight hug, "I love you, so much", I can't help but whisper into his neck. I feel him grin against my cheek, "I love you, too" he squeezes me again.

And with one last peck, he leaves and bids me and Max a goodnight.

I lay back down against my lonely cot, desperately wishing that I could be curled up in Mike's and my hammock, knowing he is safe by my side.

I hope that made up for the wait! Of course El wasn't going to die, but sometimes cliffhangers are fun.

Again, thank you SOOOOO much for the wonderful reviews! I love them all so much and you, my lovely readers!

Let me know what you think of this latest chapter and PLEASE REVIEW as always! :) You are all awesome!

30. Trials

Thank you all again for your wonderful reviews! They make this story so worth it! I know the battle scene was kind of short, but with my own approaching wedding, which is in 20 some-odd days, I've been extremely busy and want to get moving with this story.

Again, thank you for being patient with my writing!

On with the story....

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack.

El's Point of View:

The next couple of days go by in a blur. Since our discovery has been outed, Max and I are restricted to the sick bay.

My throat is finally not rough and scratchy, and I'm feeling much better. However, Max is still recovering from her wounds and sits up only when she absolutely has to. But, thankfully it has been almost a week since the incident and an infection has not set in. Right now, we are celebrating the little things.

A few men have been in and out of the sick bay, I obviously know the men, but they look at Max and I a lot differently now. And I've come to believe that the men coming in are mostly trying to catch a glimpse of us, even though I have known most of them for years.

Mike and the rest of the boys are our main visitors, for they stop in periodically throughout the day, and they always have dinner with us.

Their company is warm and inviting, and I can't help but feel an excitement each time they walk into the sick bay.

Dr. Coleman is in and out of the sick bay more times than I can count. He seems to be wary of Max and I for some reason, but I don't let it bother me.

However, I've noticed that as the trial day approaches, there's a darker look on the boys' faces. Tonight, when they come to dinner, they are much more quiet than usual.

I quirk an eyebrow up at Max, when the boys don't say much, and she shrugs her shoulders in return. Mike is sitting at the edge of my cot, he pokes at his meat, but he barely brings his pieces to his mouth to eat.

I reach out gingerly and touch his shoulder. I've seem to have startled him from his thoughts, because he jumps slightly and whips his head towards me, "What's wrong?" I whisper, my eyes searching his.

He pulls his mouth in slightly, which I know means he is trying to hide something. He tries to avoid my eyes, "N-Nothing's wrong", he states, but I fix him a stern look.

I turn to the rest of the boys, "Guys, come on, something's bothering you", I press them. The boys look up from their meals and give each other hesitant glances. Silently communicating with one another about whether or not they should say anything.

When no one speaks Max lets out a frustrated growl, "Guys, seriously, you know something, and you aren't telling us!" she barks at them.

Dustin finally speaks up, "It's not about something, it's...it's just been a little hard on the ship", he says while looking down.

Both Max and I imitate each other with a questioning look, "What do you mean?" I ask quietly.

I turn to Will as he takes in a deep breath, "It's....it's just that some of the more crude midshipman and hire up seaman have been pestering us, is all" he admits.

My eyebrows shoot up my forehead, "Pestering you how", now my attention turns to Mike, who is still poking at his food, not willing to speak.

"They're just being stupid, El" Lucas states shaking his head. "You guys aren't being very clear, just spit it out already!" Max demands, and the boys flinch.

They are quite for a moment when Mike finally speaks up, "They've been calling you whore's, and that we've been squandering you each away for our own pleasures" he growls lowly, his grip on his fork shows as his knuckles turn white.

My mouth falls open in shock, but my heart begins to ache for Mike and the rest of the boys, knowing that they've been receiving harsh words since the crew has found out about Max and I.

I shake my head in frustration, "Men", I state crossing my arms, "They don't understand anything", I growl with my own anger.

Mike finally turns to face me, "I don't care what they say about me, but what they say about you and Max isn't right. No matter how many times we've said otherwise they throw it right back to us, and it's disgusting" he growls, our eyes meet, and I can see the anger and hurt written within them.

I reach out my hand and grasp his in mine, I give it a little squeeze and I see him relax, slightly. I give him a soft smile, "You know what's true" I start as I turn to the rest of my friends, "And you all do too. And that's all that matters. Once we're back in Florida, we will disband together, and then, we all go home from there" I state matter of factly.

The boys attempt half smiles at my words, Lucas speaks up, "We know that El, but we are all from England, how are we supposed to get home?"

My spirits fade a little at his words and reasoning, and I shrug my shoulders, "We'll figure it out. But what matters is that we stay together" I state.

The boys and Max seem to accept my words, and silence falls on us once again.

We sit there silently as we scrape at our metal plates with the little food that's left. Dustin lets out a long sigh, "It's getting late, Will and I have our shift soon, and tomorrow is the trial" his mouth goes into a thin line.

The other boys begin to stand as well, stretching out their arms, Dustin and Lucas letting out long yawns.

"We'll meet with you girls in the morning before the trial" Will says as he gathers our mess plates together.

"Yeah, we will be sure to support you girls if you need us" Dustin says, however, he is directing his comment more so towards Max, who's cheeks begin to form a dusting of red as she returns his small smile.

"Thanks" she whispers to him, and he, Dustin and Lucas heads towards the door, they stop as they turn towards Mike.

Lucas opens his mouth to say something, but Max beats him to it, "Don't worry, he'll join up with you guys soon, he's got to say his lovefelt 'goodbye' to El" Max teases.

The other boys smirk and chuckle towards us. I merely roll my eyes, however, I know my face is red from Max's words. I cast her a glare which only makes her laugh more.

"Heh, okay, we'll see you in a bit, Mike" Dustin waves as he opens the door, Lucas and Will bidding goodbye as well.

Once the door is closed, both Mike and I cast our eyes towards Max's general direction and we raise our eyebrows.

She gives us a look, but then scoffs, "You two are awful" she mutters as she turns her back towards us, giving us a little privacy.

Mike turns his attention back to me, he takes my hand gently into his. He doesn't look at me, but sighs, "I promise, that no matter what happens tomorrow, I will stick by your side", he whispers these words to me, as he slowly lifts his head and his watery eyes meet mine.

I begin to feel my eyes water as well, but I attempt to hold them steady. I give his hands a tight squeeze, "I know you will be, Mike, but we have to hope that it will be okay" I say to him.

We sit in a still silence for a bit. The waves crashing around the ship allow it to creak and groan, as it moves through the ocean.

Mike sighs again, "Well, I better be off, even though I don't want to" he casts me a shy smirk. I return his smile and shake my head at him. I get closer to him and nuzzle my head under his neck, sighing at the contact.

I greedily take in his scent and hold it to memory as Mike places his chin on top of my head. He brings an arm around my back and pulls me close to him.

"Don't worry Mike, it won't be long until we are together every night" I whisper into his neck, as I place a gentle kiss on his collarbone.

He takes in a quick breath as my lips press into his cool skin. I feel his head move as he presses his lips into my hair and kisses me there.

"I know, it's just hard" he mumbles into my hair. And at those words I throw my arm around his torso and hold onto him tightly.

We stay melded together as Mike rubs his arm up and down my shoulders in gentle motions. I melt at the sensation of his touch. But, far too soon he begins to pull away.

He lets out a long breath as he turns his head to meet mine. "I'll see you in the morning" he whispers to me, and I only nod in return.

He bends down lightly, and he gingerly moves in as he places his lips on mine in a gentle embrace. It is a long, lingering kiss. It is not heated, but it is filled with the love and adoration that we hold for one another. We adjust slightly as we allow our lips to dance together.

We embrace the moment as Mike brings his hands up to tangle into my hair, ever so delicately, as he pulls my head closer to his, deepening our kiss.

I place my hands on his chest, and ball my fists into his shirt, never wanting to let go, never wanting this kiss to end.

But, as the need for air mounts, we both pull away from each other. I settle my forehead against his, and he gives me a small grin. He nuzzles his nose with mine, in which I return to him.

"I'll see you in the morning" he says quietly to me, as he begins to rise from his spot on my bed. Our hands are still tangled together, as he pulls away.

We hold onto the contact as he makes his way towards the door, our hands finally releasing the others once he is too far away. "I love you" I whisper to him, my eyes filling with tears again.

He smiles that perfect smile of his "I love you, too" he says as he opens the door and leaves once again.

My heart sinks a little, knowing that I cannot be with Mike, in our hammock, or anywhere, where we can be snuggled up to one another. I let out a frustrated huff. And at this, Max turns back around to face me.

She shakes her head a bit. "What?" I ask her. She just chuckles, "You two are sickening" she says with a small grin.

I roll my eyes at her, "Yeah, what about you and Dustin then?" I tease. And I watch in delight as Max's mouth drops open in shock.

"There's nothing" she denies, but I watch her cheeks flush as red as her hair. And I can't help but laugh. "Admit it Max, you looove him!" I croon.

"Ugh, if I wasn't in so much pain I would swat you right now!" she cries out from across the room. And I hold onto my stomach as I laugh at her mirth.

We squabble back and forth for a bit, until we finally wind back down, laying on our cots.

I look up towards the ceiling, hoping I will receive some sleep tonight.

Sleep does not greet me easily in the night. I feel my heavy eyelids finally close from exhaustion in the early morning. I fall into a deep, dark slumper that I am too soon pulled from when the second bell of the morning rings out across the ship.

I groan in protest as my eyelids slowly attempt to open. They fall and open in short bursts. My mind pushing my body to rise, but the tiredness that fogs my brain tells me otherwise.

I listen to Max stretch and yawn across the other side of the room. I turn my head towards her, as I watch her long, freckled arms stretch upwards.

She sits up slowly, one arm shaking at pushing her body up, while her other arm holds her stomach gingerly. She winces once again, but she is up nonetheless.

Max lets out another long yawn, as she throws her legs over the edge of her cot. Her bare feet hitting the cold floor, she pushes herself slightly and gingerly off of the bed.

Her tired eyes catch mine, and she gives me a small smile, "Come on, El, we've got to get ready, especially before someone else decides to come in" she states as she moves towards the washing bin that has been placed for us since we have been restricted to the sick bay.

I huff in response as I allow my eyes to flutter a bit more in tiredness. And eventually I send enough willpower to my legs as I rise. I copy Max's earlier movements as I stretch my aching limbs, and I stand to get dressed.

Will was kind enough to send me my sea bag, in which held some of my old sea gear. I gave one to Max the other day so that I could wash the blood from our sailor gear and try to make the white shirts as presentable as possible.

I had stitched up Max's shirt as best as I could, the monster having made three nasty claw marks in her pristine white shirt.

I stand to wash once Max is finished. I make sure to wash myself well, as I want to look as presentable as possible while we stand trial.

Once I am done, and give myself a quick once over in the mirror, I move to put my now clean sailor gear on once again. So as to not stand out, I still wear my old vest underneath my white shirt. Its tightness suffocates me, and I take in a deep breath as I put it on.

Finding that I had much preferred the last couple of days where I didn't need to have it on.

After I am dressed, I make my way towards Max, and help her into her gear as well. The stitching is hardly noticeable once I get it over her head. Since her wounds are still sensitive, I have her put her white shirt on first, and then I toss an old jacket over her shoulders. So that the suffocating vest does not bother her stitches, but she is allowed some modesty as well.

I then sit behind Max and comb her hair through my fingers. Her curly red hair makes it difficult and her crying out in pain as I pull at the snarls makes the work difficult, but soon, I have her beautiful red hair pulled back and braided.

She admires herself in the mirror and thanks me. I then move to my hair, which isn't as snarly and curled as Max's and I make quick work at it.

We both place our blue caps upon our heads and we smile at one another. We had both agreed to walk out on deck for our trial as the people our crew members have seen us as. That we are no different than before.

We are sitting chatting quietly when Dr. Coleman enters the sick bay. Max and I whip our heads towards the man.

Dr. Coleman is fidgeting slightly, as he shuffles between his feet. "Okay, M'ladies, it's time" he says as he holds the door wide open for us, gesturing for us to move outside.

Now that the moment has finally arrived, my stomach begins to knot, and my breakfast almost makes another appearance. But Max grabs onto my hand and squeezes it tightly. My head turns to her slowly and she gives me a warm smile and slight nod. And in that moment I swallow my nerves as we both approach the door, the trial waiting on the other side.

I take in a long deep breath as we approach the door. The sunlight is bright and my eyes squint at the harsh light, not used to the sun

being trapped in a room for almost a whole week.

Once my eyes adjust to the sun, I allow myself to take in my surroundings, and my heart begins to race wildly. Just about every crew member of *The Hawk* are on deck, and they are all staring at Max and I with wide eyes.

The silence that was washed over the deck quickly turns to hushed whispers, as men turn to one another and mutter into their neighbors ears.

There is a pathway that leads to the front of the ship, and I follow it my eyes set at the front of the ship only. Not wanting to make eye contact with any other men on the ship, not wanting to feel their anger, confusion and any other feelings they may be casting towards Max and I.

The walk to the front of the ship seems indefinitely long, feeling as if each step I took, only made the destination further away. However, with these feelings aside, we do finally make it to the front of the ship, where I see Hopper and at least ten other Captain's standing at the front. I chance a look around and notice that a good chunk of the fleet are still remaining close to us.

There are two seats in front of them, which I presume to be for Max and I. This theory is proven correct, as Hopper gestures for us to sit in them, in which we do.

A hush finally comes across the deck, I feel myself sweating from my nerves and the intense heat of the sun that shines down above us.

One of the other Captain's comes forward and stands before the podium. I recognize him as one of the Captain's who did not know about the mutiny. The disgusting grin on his faces shows that he is enjoying this a little too much.

It takes every bit of my self control to not roll my eyes at him. He stands at the podium with a straight back as he opens his mouth to speak, "We are brought together today, of the trial of Captain Hopper and..." he stops and then looks at Max and I, we give him a puzzled look.

He sputters, "What are these person's names?" he turns to look at Hopper now. I can't help but copy the smile that creeps onto Hopper's face, "There names are Eleanor Brenner, or 'El' for short and Maxine Mayfield or 'Max'" he states, as he continues to smile at us.

I hear Max give a huff at her full name, but she knows to not speak up at this moment. The other Captain clears his throat, "Very well, the trial of Eleanor Brenner and Maxine Mayfield, will proceeded by me, Captain Willoughby, along with the trial against Captain Hopper" and at this the Captain gestures grandly to himself.

"We will begin with Captain Hopper's trial" he begins to speak, and there's a couple demeaning shouts to Captain Willoughby across the deck, in which he strikes an intimidating glance to the crew members.

"As I was saying, we will begin with Captain Hopper, and how he laid mutiny to the King's Army!" he bellows.

"Captain Hopper, back in Florida, had agreed to the formation that had been agreed upon by the rest of the King's Army. However, Captain Hopper held it for himself that this plan wouldn't work, and enacted his own mutiny upon the rest of us! Leaving us open and vulnerable!" Captain Willoughby cried across the deck.

"To leave fellow Captains and ships vulnerable during a time of war is unspeakable!" the Captain shivers at the podium.

My eyes fall onto Hopper whose shaking his head and rolling his eyes at Captain Willoughby's words, knowing he did nothing in the wrong.

"Would you please explain yourself?" Captain Willoughby turns to Hopper, who raises his head slightly, but turns towards the crowd.

He clears his throat a bit before he speaks, "You all know, even the rest of you Captain's who decided to join in the mutiny, that the first plan about not going onto land, wouldn't work" at this he growls at Captain Willoughby.

"And it's a good thing we did change our plan, because floating in the ocean like sitting ducks would have gotten us nowhere" he states

looking at the crew.

Hopper looks back to Captain Willoughby, "If you didn't notice *Captain*" he strains his words, "But we didn't lose one ship in this fight, men, yes, but that is casualty of war, and it would have been much more if we didn't go through with the mutiny!" Hopper barks up to Captain Willoughby who backs away slightly.

"Our plan, if you didn't notice, succeeded, our homes are now safe once again, I'm sorry that it came to a mutiny, but it had to be done" Hopper states as the ship remains quiet.

Hopper raises his hand to the other Captain's standing on deck, "You wouldn't have followed me if you didn't think it was a good plan. You wouldn't have agreed or even showed up to our meeting in Florida if you didn't think the first plan wouldn't work, so I ask everyone, why am I even on trial, when it worked!" he yells back to Captain Willoughby.

Captain Willoughby looks stunned for a bit, but recovers, "It's because you formed a mutiny! You left us-" he tries but Hopper cuts in, his face red with anger, "If it weren't for me your sorry ass would have been at the bottom of the ocean by now! You sorry son of a bitch wouldn't even come when the first fleet tried attacking the island all those years ago!"

Captain Willoughby has no words as he watches Hopper, he flounders for a bit, unable to come up with words, so Hopper continues. "If you *honestly* think I'm to blame, then cast me overboard now! The mainlands are safe, the island is destroyed, I can live with that" he shrugs his shoulders, as he turns back to Captain Willoughby.

"Just ask them all now, see what they say, and let's move on" he raises his hand to the other Captain, who finally pulls himself together. He tugs at his collar, "Very well then, all in favor of a death trial for Captain Hopper?" he asks the crowd as the sorry cow raises his own hand. Only two of the other Captain's gingerly raise their hands, as the crew of *The Hawk*, shake their heads in disbelief of this trial.

Captain Willoughby shakes his head in disgust, "Those in favor of

dropping the trial and-" before he can even finish every seaman's hand, and the rest of the Captain's shoot into the air.

Captain Willoughby sighs in defeat, "Very well" he sputters, "Captain Hopper is free of crimes against the crowd". And at this the crew cheers victoriously about. Max and I join in. However, Captain Willoughby brings us back by a loud, "Wait, one moment, there is still one trial left", and at this the crowd goes silent.

Knowing that this is the trial that has been waited for, my stomach knots remembering just why Max and I are sitting here.

Captain Willoughby turns to us with a sneer and proclaims loudly, "We will begin the trial of Eleanor and Maxine and to determine the punishment for these two woman, who snuck onto this ship, and passed by as men!" he barks out across the ship.

There are small mutterings that begin to rise within the crowd, but Captain Willoughby continues, "We will start with Ms. Brenner, who has presided on this ship for...how long Captain Hopper?" he turns towards Hopper.

Hopper again smiles, "Almost six years, Captain" he nods his head to me. "Six years?!" Captain Willoughby sputters. Hopper gives the other Captain a wide smile, "Yep, six years of service she has given to this ship" he remarks.

Captain Willoughby pulls himself together once again, "Anywhom, Eleanor, please rise", Captain Willoughby asks, and I do as he says and stand to my feet. I'm sure to keep my back straight, my arms at my side, and my head raised proudly.

"Captain" I raise my hand in salute as I was taught many years ago, and regard him in turn. The motion seems to surprise the Captain a bit, but he continues to speak, "Is it true to what Captain Hopper stated, that you have been posing as a man for the last six years upon this vessel?" he asks.

I nod my head shortly, "Yes, Sir, I have" I state honestly. He nods his head in approval, "And what, may I ask, prompted you to do so?" he questions me. And I feel a bit of relief, knowing that I will be able to

explain my story, so I do.

"Sir, many years ago, my father was killed in a raid by one of the monsters. The woman caretaker in our home, who was very much like my mother, prompted her son and I to run, to run far away, to get to safety" I begin a bit shakily, my memories of the attack playing across my mind as if they had happened yesterday.

"So, Will, who is like my brother, we ran. And we were attacked by a monster, but survived by rolling down a steep cliff" I explained. "We knew the only way we could get away would be to pass onto a ship, and the only way I could do that was if I passed as a boy" I said.

"So, I cut my hair, put on one of Will's outfit, and we somehow made passage onto *The Hawk*, and it became our home" I whisper this part as I feel my eyes prick with tears. Knowing that this vessel has become more of a home than my previous one had been.

"We made friends, great friends", and at this I take a moment to scan the crowd, and there I spot Mike, Will, Dustin and Lucas staring at Max and I, their face softening at my words.

"I learned the way of the ship, just like any other ship's boy, and for some reason, I passed as a boy" I shrugged my shoulders with a small smile, and at this Captain Willoughby frowned.

I open my mouth to continue, however, he cuts me off, "So, you're saying, you passed as a ship's boy, where you earned the wages in which another *true* boy could have been earning?" he fires at me.

I sputter a bit at his words, angered by his demeaning presence, I glare my eyes at him, "No", I state plainly, "I worked just as hard as the other ship's boys on this vessel, I *earned* my place, my earnings, I didn't steal anything" I say through my teeth.

Captain Willoughby eyes me seedily, "What I mean, Ms. Brenner, is that did you not, take away a placement of ship's boy, that could have gone to a *proper* boy?" he shakes his head towards me.

I honestly wish I could slap him across his face for his arrogance, so I fight back, "Obviously not, *Sir*, for, I was chosen in belief that I was a

boy, so shouldn't that falt fall on someone else, hmmm?" I give him a steely glare.

Although I do not want to blame Mr. Powell for this situation, I can't help but throw it out there. Captain Willoughby startles back a bit at my words, and I give him a look of challenge.

He sputters again, "Well, that as it may be, Ms. Brenner, it is still illegal for woman to board a vessel of war!" he shouts out over me.

I shake my head to him, "As I stated earlier, I worked just as hard as the rest of the men on this vessel, I earned my place here", I say this to the Captain, but then turn towards my crew mates. They are giving me earnest glances, and I give them a soft look, "You all know me as 'El', you all accepted me onto this ship, some of you taught me, some of you brought me under your wing" I say to them.

"You wouldn't have done that, if you didn't think I wasn't going to learn" I move my head, catching glances with particular members of the ship, including Steve and Jonathan, who are staring at me wide eyed.

"But, apparently, as Captain Willoughby has stated, if you had known I was a girl, you wouldn't even give me a second glance, however, knowing me as a boy, you did, so I ask all of you, what's the difference?" I place the question among the men. And I watch as they shift uncomfortably at my words.

I turn back to Captain Willoughby, "These men", I cast my hand to the ship, "Are my family", tears begin to prick at my eyes, and I allow them to flow freely. "More so than my family back in England" I state.

"Those seaman" now I'm pointing towards my group of boys who are smiling widely at me, "Who were ship's boys, just like me, walking onto this vessel, they are my brother's, and my love as well" at those last words, I meet Mike's eyes, and I watch him blush furiously, while the ship erupts once again with mutterings.

And apparently this has caught the attention of Captain Willoughby as well, "Love!?" He cries out. I turn my hard face back to him and nod, not afraid of my words, "Yes. I was fortunate to find love hear

on this deck as well, with one of the ship's boys. And I wouldn't trade it for the world" I admit.

Now Captain Willoughby is shaking his head wildly, "So, you've been whoring around with these men then?!". At this although I want to yell and scream at the pathetic man, I stand my ground and shake my head.

"No, Sir. I have kept my virtue pure. I do, however, plan to marry this man once we get things settled here", I state matter of factly, as a gasp from the men echo across the deck.

"Why, you..." Captain Willoughby's face is red with fury, because I know he is caught. I turn back towards my fellow crew mates.

"Do you honestly believe that Max and I haven't earned our place here?" I ask them, as I watch the men turn towards one another.

"Do you not believe that the relationships we have built with you aren't true, because to us, they are. But...if you truly believe we do not belong on this ship, then we will leave" I turn to Captain Willoughby, "This is not your ship to take command of. If my crew mates want Max and I gone, then fine, but let them decide" I state quietly.

Captain Willoughby runs my words through his head for a moment, but then he huffs a sigh, "Very well, however, I do believe that *true* seaman, will know the right thing to do!" he shouts this across the deck.

The deck becomes silent for a moment. I watch as they all exchange nervous glances with one another. My heart beats against my ribs wildly.

"Woman shouldn't be allowed on ships!" a cry comes across the deck. And a few cheers of agreement back this cry up. And I feel my heart sink deep into the depths of my being. Not because of the fear, but the feeling of betrayal that has passed through me.

It's quiet again, and Captain Willoughby speaks up, a satisfying grin on his face, that I so wish to smack off of him, "Well, if that's the only

word then we have no choice but to-" but he is cut off by a sharp "Wait!" across the deck.

And to my surprise I see Jonathan make his way to the middle of the pathway. All eyes are now on him, my breath catches in my throat.

Jonathan falters for a bit before he finds his voice, "El and Max, have every right to be on this ship" he states clearly.

My heart begins to raise from its depths. "Both of these two fine woman, El especially, who has been here longer, have proved themselves over and over again" Jonathan bellows out into the crowd.

"It's not fair to believe they do not belong on this ship, when we had no clue beforehand because apparently, we're idiots" he chuckles a little bit.

"These two girls are smart enough to fool us, to become one of us, and we don't stand up for them?" Jonathan questions the crowd. "If anyone deserves to not be on this ship, it's all of us who do *not* believe in these girls and the light they have brought to us" Jonathan turns to us and gives us a wide smile.

The tears are trickling down my face now. Knowing, that there *are* true friends aboard this ship. And once Jonathan has finished speaking, Steve steps forward as well.

"Jonathan's right. El and Max have every right to be here. They have caused no harm, and have only brought joy to this ship!" he shouts out across the crowd.

And now, as I look out across my fellow seaman, I can see them begin to nod their heads in agreement to Jonathan and Steve's words.

"Let'em stay!" one voice echoes, and soon, there are cheers and agreements being shouted across the deck.

And before we know it, the whole ship is cheering for us, my heart swells.

I turn to look at Captain Willoughby, whose face has gone white in

shock, and his mouth is open like a blubbering fish.

He attempts to bring order to the ship by smacking his hand hard over the podium he stands just tall enough to reach. He bellows, "Order, order!" across the screaming crowd. But, it takes Hopper's loud, "Silence!" that settles the men down.

I feel Max's hand reach out to grasp mine, I turn my head towards her, and I can see the tears streaming from her eyes as well.

Captain Willoughby shakes his head, "Fine, a vote then, all in favor of keeping the woman on board-" and before he can finish, the seaman bellow out so loudly, that I'm sure it would have knocked him right off of the podium.

I can't help but laugh and smile at my crewmates cheering, knowing that deep down, they did care.

After the cheering calms down enough, Captain Willoughby eyes the seaman with his dark beady eyes, and clears his throat, "Those opposed, to the atrocity of having woman aboard this vessel?" he casts out, he stands on his tiptoes, desperately seeking for someone's hand to be raised.

However, even as I turn my head back to the crowd, I see most of the seaman giving Captain Willoughby a death stare that probably would have stopped him dead in his tracks.

Silence. Not even a whisper is heard among the crowd. Not even from those who first opposed, knowing that they would probably get their poor bodies tossed overboard for speaking against Max or I.

Captain Willoughby casts his eyes among the crowd much longer than most judges would. But finally, he admits defeat, he lets out a frustrated groan, shakes his head and says, "Fine! Have it your way then! By vote, it has come to term that Eleanor Brenner and Maxine Mayfield are fit to stay aboard *The Hawk*" He grumbles.

And once the announcement is made, the whole ship erupts in cheers again, as Max and I are charged by our large family.

We are picked up and hugged fiercely by the crew. Max and I cheer

along with them.

As we are placed back down, we are almost immediately picked back up again, to be hugged and squeezed by another crew member, we can't help but return the favors.

But, it's when we hear a "S'cuse us, c'mon let us through!" the crowd of seaman begin to move away as our friends squeeze their way through the crowd.

Will is the first one to make it through, and I can see he has tears in his eyes, and I open my arms and welcome his embrace.

"You did it!" he cries into my shoulder, and I can't help but cry in return, "If it wasn't for our friend's kind words, we probably would be off right now" I say as I pull away from him, both our faces wide with smiles.

Lucas and Dustin break through together, Dustin hugs me, as Lucas embraces Max, and then they switch.

"We're so happy that you girls can stay!" Lucas cheers into my shoulder and I laugh in agreement.

And just as Lucas lets go of me, my eyes finally meet the one person I've been waiting for. Just as his black curly hair makes it through the crowd, our dark eyes meet.

His smile is unforgettable as he rushes towards me and swoops me into his arms. I squeal as he picks me up off of my feet and spins me, the crowd moves away from us slightly, small cheers still erupting around us.

Mike finally stops spinning us, and he just holds me in his arms, close to him. Our eyes search one another, his hands on my waist pull me even closer.

"I've been wanting to do this for a long time" he admits, and before I can even say a word, Mike bends me just so and his body follows mine, and in a heartbeat his lips find mine, electricity spreading throughout our bodies unlike any other time we have kissed.

Even louder cheering erupts around us and I can't help but grin into the kiss as I tangle my hands into his dark hands.

And oh, to quickly he bends us back upright, and rests his forehead against mine, his eyes deep and dark with love and affection, "I love you, so much" he says so deeply and full of affection.

I can't help but give him a wide smile in return, as I run my hands through his hair that is swirling about in the wind, "I love you, with all my heart" I whisper back. And with those words I pull his head towards mine, and place a searing kiss onto his awaiting lips, in which he so eagerly returns.

We finally melt into the moment, where we no longer have to hide our love, our affection from one another and we can finally just be together.

I'm about to deepen the kiss even more when I hear a booming voice cut through the still cheering crowd, "Okay, break it up you four, no one needs to see that!" I recognize the voice as Hopper's as he stands by Mike and I, eyeing us warily, as we break apart.

"Sorry, Hopper", I say not so innocently, in which he rolls his eyes. But then he turns next to us and says, "Hey, I said enough!"

I turn abruptly in Mike's arms, and my mouth goes wide as I witness Max pulling her lips away from Dustin's mouth. Max's red face matches her hair, and Dustin just stands dumbstruck.

Hopper shakes his head at both of us couples and sighs, "We'll have to have a discussion about this later, but, tonight we celebrate our victory!" He cries out to the seaman, as he pushes his fist into the air. And we all return it with glee.

I embrace Mike once again, and I settle into his chest as I marvel at the good fortune, that has finally been bestowed upon us.

I know, another long wait. I hope this chapter didn't suck, I just wanted to get it done because there's something I want to get to! And I probably will in the next chapter!

Let me know what you think, I know the trial was lame, but I

still love your REVIEWS! So please put them up and I will get back to you soon!

Thanks again for reading!

31. Uncertainty

As always, everyone's reviews have been so awesome and wonderful to read! I'm glad you all liked the last chapter too because I was unsure of it. Finally approaching a chapter I have been dying to get to!

Thank you all again for reading!

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things* or *Bloody Jack*.

El's Point of View:

It's amazing to finally be able to be myself upon the vessel of which I have spent years hiding my true self. I no longer wear a tight vest against my chest, but instead have a simple, light wrap around my chest. The feeling is breathtaking now that I am no longer burdened with having to keep my chest completely covered, and I can breathe easily once again.

Also, Max and I no longer have to keep our long curly hair tied up as often as we had to. Now, we can allow our curls to move along in the salty breeze, as we let the wind guide us.

It takes the other seaman aboard the ship a bit to get used to realizing that Max and I are woman. But, as we often remind them, they are to not treat us any differently than when we were pretending to be men.

And, most of them do. For, we are still expected to follow our routines and participate in the daily chores, in which Max and I do with no fight or complaints.

I do, however, find it more annoying that some of the seaman ogle at Max and I. And I cannot help but roll my eyes when I catch one of them staring at either of us. Thankfully though, we each have our own salty seaman, in which they tend to not stray too far from either of us. Plus, we have Lucas, Will, Jonathan and Steve who keep an eye on the wandering eyes of the other seaman.

Benjy and Murray are funny at first too. For, when they first hear about my female ways, I watch their small eyes wander my body. I hear them and Finny and Lenny get into a fight about it as well, once Benjy and Murray discover the other two already knew about me being female.

However, a quick pat on their heads, a warm look and smile. And the boys all but seem to forget as to what they are fighting about.

Now that they know, I've found that they tend to snuggle up to me when we are standing out on the deck at dusk, when the sun begins to set against the horizon. This comes from Finny and Benjy especially.

Sometimes, they rest their heads upon my shoulder, as I wrap my arms around them both. And I feel their tensions wash away.

Even the bravest of boys, they are still young, and the embrace of a woman, I'm sure, reminds them of their own mothers, as they settle into my being.

The joy of feeling so free builds within my chest, and I cannot help but bask in the elation that constantly sits in my heart.

The celebration of Max and mine's freedom, on top of Hopper's goes on for a couple of days. The rations of rum increased, which also meant an increase in stumbling, muttering men. And on these days Mike decided to stay extra close to me, making sure the other seaman knew who I belonged to.

Not that I really cared anyways. Having Mike at my side for almost three days was exciting. We no longer had to pull each other away into the dark corners of the ship for our lips to find one another. For, we could share a friendly peck or a long, sweet good-bye, and we are not ostracized for showing our affection.

However, I can't say that Mike doesn't pull me to our old hiding spots in which his hands eagerly wander my body. But, I don't blame him, for my hands wander too. Our breaths become heated with one another, and by the end our hearts are beating out of our chests in excitement.

We always smile warmly at one another in the end, tangled in each others arms. Welcoming the closeness we are now allowed to share.

Mike likes to talk about Florida, and how we will be making shore soon. However, he has yet to bring up any mention of our impending marriage, which I find rather odd.

There are times when we just lay in our hammock, in which other seaman have argued about. But, one look from Hopper tells them to not complain otherwise. And Mike talks about going home and seeing his family.

I try to weasel in the talk of marriage, but he always rebuffs me, or changes the subject quickly. I'm starting to begin to feel as if Mike has possibly changed his mind, and it worries me. But, the way he holds me and kisses me tells me otherwise. And now, I am a confused mess.

I attempt to not let it bother me, but it does.

As we are only a couple days out from Florida, I pull Max aside one morning to talk.

"I don't think he wants to marry me anymore", I say to Max solemnly as I look out over the railing of *The Hawk*.

Max chuckles, "Is that what this is about?" she asks me, with her freckled grin aimed towards me.

I shrug my shoulders in return as I begin to fiddle with my hands, "It's just...I've tried to bring it up to him...but he counters it each time, maybe he's having second thoughts" I mumble.

I feel Max's hand on my shoulder, I turn to look at her, my eyes a bit watery, and she gives me a soft look, "El", she says softly, "You know that's not true, maybe, he's just waiting is all", she suggests.

I give her a confused look, "But what is he waiting for, he already asked me" I say wistfully as I reach up to grab my earring and I fiddle with the cold metal between my fingers.

Max watches me as I play with the symbol of love and promise that

Mike made to me, and defeat runs through me.

I let go of the gold ring and sigh, "Max, I don't know what to do" I whisper, and a stray tear drips out of my eye, I watch as it lands gently on the wooden railing, as it quickly evaporates in the heat.

Max sighs beside me, "El, don't be silly, Mike loves you, don't give up on him" she pleads with me.

I meet her blue eyes with mine, and I can see that they are filled with truth. I let out a long breath and slowly nod my head. Max gives me a warm smile, "That's the El I know" she says laughing lightly as she pulls me into a side hug.

As she holds me to her side, I close my eyes slowly and my mind flashes to Joyce. Max's warmth and kindness mimicking the feeling of Joyce's hugs.

My heart flutters in my chest as I think of Joyce for a moment, and my mind begins to wander about how she is doing, and is she still alive?

But as soon as they come, I shake them aside, no, I have to believe she is still okay, and we will know soon enough, remembering Hopper's promise of sailing back to England once we restock in Florida, and my heart leaps in joy or seeing Joyce once again.

I decide to let Max's words sit with me for awhile. But the fight between my heart and head is a fierce battle, and I find myself distancing my presence from Mike.

My heart aches each time I do so, but I can't shake the feeling of dread that overwhelms me every time I see him. Believing that now that the battle and everything is over that maybe 'we' are over too.

Every time Mike tries to approach me, or gives me a small smile, I have a difficult time returning the smile back, and make excuses to not go off with him.

"Sorry, not right now Mike, I've got to go find Will" I tell him the day before we are to make land in Florida.

He gives me a questioning look, "El, is everything okay? I feel like you don't want to even be around me", he says sadly as he gives me a pained expression.

I sigh and shake my head, "No, everything is fine, I...just told him I'd meet him is all" I shrug my shoulders to him as I turn away.

"Oh, okay" I hear him behind me as I walk away from him, my heart slowly breaking.

Florida finally comes into our sights the next day, and the crew gives a triumphant cheer as we approach the land. It's definitely nice to see land once again, after being back at sea for a couple of months.

Although, this is one of our shortest voyages from going from land to sea and back to land again, the swaying palm trees and soft sand are inviting.

As we get closer to the land it's easy to see that the shore is lined with crowds of people, they are all waving and cheering as our ship and the rest of the fleet approach the land once again.

It is a right celebration. My eyes widen as I take in the mass amount of people on shore who are tossing colored confetti at us and into the wind as we make anchor.

The rest of the seaman aboard are just as excited. I watch as a group of woman approach *The Hawk*, they scream out their sailors names, who I am sure spent a good amount of time with them while on shore last time.

Our seaman eagerly wave back as they pump out their chests, like proud peacocks showing off their feathers.

Our small group hangs together by the railing of the ship as we wave and cheer in victory as well.

Once the gangway plank has been set, the seaman aboard our ship anxiously make their way off of the ship, as they are greeted by their land lovers. Some of the seaman greet their woman with a wide, swinging hug and a long kiss placed upon each others mouths.

My heart pangs as I watch this interaction. I slowly turn to look at Mike, who is giving me dark, but loving eyes, and my face softens a bit as I watch his movements.

He comes close to me, "Meet me at the fountain, at dusk" he whispers into my ear. I give him a confused look, as he throws me a wink, and he is off following the other sailors onto land.

My heart and head are battling once again, unsure as to what Mike's words actually mean. *Does he want to tell me we're done? Or, is there something else?*

My head begins to hurt as different scenarios play across my head. I'm brought out of my reverie when a hand clasps my shoulder, "Come on El, let's hit my old tavern!" Max cries out as she pulls me along with the other boys in tow.

I nod my head solemnly and attempt a fake smile, as I follow along.

The tavern is packed once again by seaman and their colorful woman from a variety of ships from the King's army.

Loud music echoes across the walls of the small tavern, and the sound is deafening with the combination of the boisterous voices of the men who are singing, really shouting, along with the music.

I cringe at the thundering noise, as I weave through the crowd with Max and the other boys. Once we reach the bar, Max just about dives over the counter to meet with the barmaid's, who accepts Max's hug with a warm and tender embrace.

"Oi, my little Maxina has returned!" the tall stout woman coos, rolling her 'r's as she squishes the red head into her chest.

Max's face turns just as red as she is squeezed into the woman, "Lorinda, I'm so happy to see you again!" Max's muffled cry is just barely heard.

Max pulls away and she turns her attention to us, "Lorinda, these are my good friends, El, Lucas, Will and Dustin" she points to each of us as she introduces us, but her smile widens and she turns even redder when she introduces Dustin.

The large woman looks at us with a grinning smile, "Oh, it's so nice to meet Maxina's friends!" she shouts over the crowd. "Such cuties you all are!" and at this Lorinda reaches forward as she squeezes each of our cheeks, as we wince at the pain.

"It's, uh, nice to meet you too", this comes quietly from Dustin, who is giving Max a loving look, and it doesn't go unnoticed by Lorinda.

She reaches forward and grabs onto Dustin's white shirt and pulls him in for a close look, Dustin's eyes go wide as she pokes and prods at him.

Finally, she pulls him into a deep hug, just like Max's and squeezes tight, "Oh, my Maxina, you know how to choose the cute ones!" she pulls Dustin back and plants a huge kiss onto his cheeks.

I can't help but chuckle at Dustin and Max's red faces at Lorinda's words. "Come now children, I'll pour you all a drink, 'eet is on the house tonight for Maxina's friends!" she cheers to us, in which Dustin, Lucas and Will grin widely at her words.

And within moments Lorinda has placed five tankards of a foaming beer onto the bar. The boys and Max all reach for one, I hesitate, knowing that this beer is stronger than the stuff on the ship.

I watch as the boys grab their tankards and bow the wooden monstrosities towards them. They each take a heavy swig and sigh in delightment at the beer.

"Wow, that's good!" Will exclaims, which surprises me a bit. He sees my questioning look and pushes my tankard towards me, "Come on El, just try it" he goads at me.

I hesitate, but I reach out and grab the tankard, I slowly bring it to my my mouth. The smell hits me before the liquid does, a rich, bitter note hits my nose and it wrinkles a bit at the strongness of the drink. The metal lip touches my mouth and I open, letting the cool, stinging drink against my tongue and throat.

I swallow hard. It's definitely strong, but the after note I find I like. My tongue wipes away the foam that has accumulated on my top lip,

and I nod to Will, "It's good" I smile lightly.

He gives me a wide grin back as he raises his tankard, and Max, Lucas and Dustin mimic his actions they point them towards me, and I raise mine.

"To *The Hawk!*" Will cries, "To *The Hawk!*" we echo back and clank our tankards together, as we each take a long swig from our drinks.

I find as I keep drinking the liquid, my nerves and worries about Mike begin to disappear, as I begin to lighten up a bit.

The day drags on and I am begin to feel light. I throw my arm around Max who is just as light as I am, "You know Max" I stutter a bit, as the red head turns towards me, "It's okay if Mike doesn't want to b-be with me" I say to her.

"I-I'm sure he's found someone better" my loose tongue spills out, and at this Max chuckles, "And who would he find El, we just got to land a couple hours ago?" she shakes her head at me.

I point an unsteady hand into her face, "I just know", I say hanging my head lightly, and at that, tears begin to prick at my eyes.

Max notices this, as she brings a hand under my chin, our eyes meeting. She searches my face, "El, don't say that, Mike loves you" she whispers earnestly.

I pull back slightly, "Then w-why hasn't he talked about marriage or anything?" I whisper as I let the tears fall.

Max sighs, "Because El, I'm sure he has good reason" she shrugs her shoulders.

I shake my head at her as I sway on my bar stool, "Then why isn't he here now" I raise my hands dramatically, "And then he told me to meet him at the fountain later, what's with that?" I ask.

Max's eyebrows shoot up, "Wait, when are you supposed to meet him?" she questions hurriedly.

I think hard with my dizzying mind, "Uh, dusk?" I say unsure.

Max jumps from her seat, "Then we've got to go!" she says, as she pulls at my arm. I stumble slightly as she pulls me from my stool, "Boys, we've got to go!" Max shouts loudly over the crowd to the other boys.

They turn to the redhead, "Why?" Lucas questions as he sways a bit, Max rolls her eyes, "Because, *Mike*, needs her at the fountain" Max's words are a bit strained as she encourages the boys to get moving.

And after a minute of their brains fighting against the alcohol, their eyes widen, "Oh, shit!" Dustin cries as he sets his tankard down, the other boys following suit, as Max just about drags me out the door.

Once we are outside, I shake away from Max's grasp, she gives me a wild look, "El, come on, we've got to go!" she cries.

But I stay in my spot as I shake my head and wrap my arms around me, "No, why should I go, Mike doesn't love me anymore", my drunken brain cries to me.

Will approaches me and grabs my hand, our eyes meet, his wide with truth and mine wet from my tears that now streak down my face.

He pulls me to him and gives me a small hug, "El, Mike still loves you, and never stopped, just...give him a chance, okay?" he whispers into my ear, and he pulls away, he gives me his 'trust me' smile, as he begins to pull at me.

I sigh, but I nod my head, the others smile widely, as we begin to pick up our pace again.

Our gait is a bit shuffled and stumbly as we recover from the alcohol we consumed. My mind clears a bit from the fresh air. We finally reach the fountain, in which is illuminated softly by melting candles and lanterns that are scattered about.

Through my haze, I see someone sitting by the fountain, his feet scratch at the ground beneath him.

Not so silently we make it to the square, and our loud footfalls alert the person at the fountain as he lifts his head quickly.

Mike's curly black hair is wispy around his head, and his face softens

as his dark eyes meet mine.

I stop in place, feeling hesitant, but Will pulls me closer to the fountain, he turns towards me with a small smile, "El, it's okay" he whispers as we near Mike.

The others stay put behind us, as Mike remains closer to the fountain, Will and I finally get closer to him and Will sets me in front of him.

Our eyes never leave each other, as I wrap my arms around myself again, feeling the security of them wrapped around my waist.

Will speaks, "Sorry, we're late, uh, got a little into our drinks" he shrugs his shoulders as he scratches the back of his head.

Mike breaks our eye contact briefly to acknowledge the brown haired boy, "It's okay Will, thanks for bringing her" he smiles to the boy who retreats back to the others, who have settled a good distance away from us. Curiosity begins to peak within me.

My gaze is pulled from them as I feel Mike's hand on my arm, I jump a bit at his contact, but I shyly look at him.

"Hey" he says gently, his mouth turning up into that smile I oh so love, and I feel myself begin to melt as his gaze. But, I remember I'm not too happy with him and hesitate.

"Hi" I return quickly, not fully meeting his gaze, but Mike turns towards the fountain and grabs something I didn't notice there before.

He brings up a small, but delicately prepared bouquet of flowers, he holds them in front of me, and I can't help the little smile that creeps onto my face.

"These are for you" he whispers as he gestures them towards me. I gingerly reach my hands up and take them from his grip. I close my eyes as I take in their heavenly scent, that remind me of the sweet tropical oasis we spent that lovely evening together.

I open my eyes slowly and look up to Mike, who is giving me a soft look, he holds my hands in his, as he pulls me closer, his look

changes to that of which I can only see as guilt and my heart rate speeds up a bit.

"El" he begins, his eyes still not meeting mine, "I-I want to apologize for the last couple of weeks, for not being so....attentive and such" he explains quickly. My hazy brain takes a moment to register the words, I give him a small nod to know I'm still listening.

Mike takes a deep breath and finally his eyes meet mine, "El, I have to tell you, just how much you mean to me", he starts, and now my heart is beating frantically against my ribcage.

"After the fight was over, all I could think of was, now....now we can finally be together, we could finally get married" his soft voice brings me closer to him.

"But" he stutters a bit, and now that dread and anxiety are building, I hold my breath, awaiting his next words.

"But, I kept feeling like, I hadn't properly asked you, that I didn't even have anything to give you" he stressed to me as his hands held onto mine tightly.

"So, I thought about it for a bit, and realized I needed to do this right", and at this Mike takes one of his hands away from mine and he digs around in his pocket.

And I watch as he pulls something out and he grasps it firmly grasps it in his fist.

He then takes a deep breath, "I know I should have been more attentive, but I also wanted to surprise you, that's why I was talking with Max and making sure you were okay, but obviously you weren't...and it kills me that I did that to you" Mike gives me a pleading look.

I can barely remember how to breathe as Mike talks about the last couple of weeks. "El, I promise, I will never do that to you again, and I'm so sorry if I made you feel like I didn't care, that I didn't love you because I do, I love you so much" he explains with a wide grin.

"And", he says as he pulls back again, but this time he gets down,

balancing himself on one knee, as he grips onto my hand, "That's why I needed to do this right, to make sure that you know how much I love you".

My eyes widen at his actions, "El, you are the most important person to me in this world, I couldn't imagine being apart from you, you are my everything" our eyes meet, and I feel my mouth turn into a wide grin, as my worry washes away.

"That's why I want you to be my wife" he grins, "El, will you marry me?" Mike says so softly, as he opens up his fist and I gasp when I see the small silver band, with a tiny white diamond embedded within its silver flesh.

I gap at him, and my words choke in my mouth as I attempt to speak, but my emotions overwhelm me. The happy tears begin to pour from my face, and instead of answering him, I dive down and wrap my arms around Mike's neck, as my lips eagerly find his, as I place a scorching kiss on his lips.

Mike steadies us, as he returns the kiss with fever. Our kiss pouring all the emotions and love that we have for one another into this one moment.

However, Mike breaks away slightly, "Is that a yes?" he asks with the biggest grin he has ever worn. I return it as I nod vigorously "Yes, you idiot of course I'll marry you!" I cry into him, as I place my mouth back onto his and we melt into each other's embrace.

We continue for a moment until loud cheering behind us breaks us away. We are still holding onto each other tightly as our friends rush to greet us.

"We knew she would say yes, you had nothing to worry about Mike!" Dustin exclaims as they near us.

I turn my head and give Mike a sly smile, "You thought I would say no?" I tease him as his face reddens. "I well..I" he stutters a bit, but I chuckle lightly and give him a peck on the cheek.

"Yeah, El, Mike has been in a panic for the last couple of weeks, that's

why he was so distant, and I told you not to worry", Max states.

I burrow my face into Mike's shoulder in embarrassment, and Mike holds me tighter. "Yeah, I had to beg Hopper for some extra payment too, I wanted to give you the perfect ring, which by the way-" he states as he holds it up into the setting up, and nods towards me.

My grin feels like it's about to burst off of my face, as I hold out my left hand, and Mike slides it easily onto my ring finger. The delicate piece of silver with the small diamond glimmers up at me.

I look up to Mike with a soft look and whisper, "It's perfect". He gives me a soft look in return.

"I guess we've got a wedding to plan then" Will says lightly.

And we all nod in agreement.

Just as the sun sets across the horizon, we decide it's time to head back to the ship. Max and the boys begin to head off, but Mike holds me back for a bit, I give him a questioning look.

"I just want to make sure you're okay" he whispers gently, as he reaches up to brush my cheek lightly. I accept the gesture and bend into his touch.

I look up at him with sparkling eyes, "I am now, but I was worried before" I chuckle. Mike wraps his arms around my waist as he spins me gently.

Our laughs mingle together, as he sets me gently onto the ground. We stare into each other faces for a moment, "I love you", I whisper up to him, in which he smiles down to me, "I love you, more" he states as he bends down, and his lips eagerly find mine.

My hands reach up to tustle his hair, goading his face closer to mine, not wanting any space between us.

Mike begins to nip at my lower lip, in which I open my mouth and his tongue slides into my mouth. We moan at the contact as Mike pulls at my hip to pull me closer to him.

I can feel his excitement against me and I smirk into our kiss, I break away slightly to whisper, "Easy now Mike, we'll get there".

He chuckles against my lips, as he brings them together tightly again, and as he pulls apart he says, "I cannot *wait* to marry you, and have you all to myself" he growls.

And I can't help but moan into him as we find each others lips again, we meld together for what seems like an eternity as the sun finally sets beyond the horizon.

I know, the wedding didn't happen this chapter, but I felt like they needed a little tension in their very perfect relationship I have in this story, I don't like conflict, hahaha. But, I also wanted to give a base for the wedding as well and not just jump into it.

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, the wedding will be coming soon and I want it to be perfect!

As always, thank you for reading, and PLEASE REVIEW! You guys are always awesome with this! :)

32. Putting Everything Together

Once again, thank you all for your wonderful reviews! Over 200 now which is crazy! And that's all thanks to those who review either just once, or multiple times, any and all are appreciated! And I'm glad you all enjoyed the last chapter as well. Some have been asking for some new perspectives, which I think I can wiggle into this next chapter.

On with the story...

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

Hopper's Point of View:

The sun has already set across the horizon, but the sky still resonates with an deep orange and pink hue. The ocean echoes the colors as it moves endlessly.

I set my eyes on the sight and let out a long sigh. It's one of relief in which I feel is well earned after the long tenure of waiting. It's amazing to think that the fight, the battle, the war is over and now we can take a moment to just breathe.

However, that moment didn't last long after the trial when that young Wheeler kid came up to me one evening.

Flashback

The trial had just ended and only a couple days had passed. You could feel the lightness that finally settled amongst the crew. The anxious air no longer permeated around us.

We were setting course to the shore of Florida, where we would re-group, de-stress and ready ourselves to return to England. I knew the young ones of El's little group were especially eager to set our course to their home land.

I cast my glance to their eager group, they all stood together in a tight circle, just talking. Smile's etching their faces, their eyes light

and joyful. Apart of me felt relief to see them finally relax and not worrying about dying every single day.

But, my thoughts are interrupted by a small tap on my shoulders. I furrow my brows in interest, as I turn towards the source, and there, Mr. Wheeler stands.

I give him a once over and take in his appearance. I can tell he is desperately trying to remain calm, but his shifting eyes and fiddling hands give him away immediately.

I give him a small grunt, "What do you want, Wheeler?" I ask with a low voice.

The dark haired boy opens his mouth to speak, but no words come out, so he closes his gaping mouth, takes in a breath and tries again, "I-I'd like to speak to you, Sir. Alone" he finishes stuttering his words.

I scrunch my face up at him, and his eyes finally meet mine, determined to feel some sort of control over this situation.

I don't answer him immediately, but I give in and let out another long breath, "Alright, Wheeler, lets head to my quarters", I say while gesturing him towards my cabin.

Wheeler lets out a nervous breath, nods, and turns to follow me.

Once we are in my cabin, I sit at the creaking chair at my desk. I throw my shined leather boots onto my desk, fold my arms behind my head and nod to Wheeler, "Well, what've you got to say?" I ask the nervous boy.

Wheeler swallows hard, but he holds himself high, and moves to stand directly in front of my desk. "Hopper" he starts, and our eyes meet, "Captain" he changes his wordings, "There's...something I've wanted to...to ask you", he splays out his hands while he's talking.

I nod to the boy, "What is it that you want to ask, boy?" I question him, my interests peaking at hearing what he has to say.

I watch in interest as Wheeler lets out a nervous breath as he attempts to speak at the same time, so it comes out as,

"CanIhaveaincreaseinpaySir?" while he struggled to take a breath in, which to me, is an amusing sight.

My brain takes a moment to register what Wheeler word vomits at me. But, they finally materialize and make sense.

My eyes lock onto his, as I can tell that he is attempting to not faint right there. "You want an increase in pay, Wheeler?" I question the boy, who gives a slow nod and a "Yes, Sir", in answer.

I pull my feet off of my desk and lean forward towards him. "And, why, Mr. Wheeler, would I give you an increase in pay?" I ask.

And I can tell immediately that this was the part Wheeler is dreading the most. For, his eyes close slowly, and open again, "I uh-I just need it" he states lamely shrugging his shoulders.

I let out a barking laugh, and I see Wheeler freeze in his spot, his eyes widening at my sudden outburst.

I shake my head at the boy, "Just because you need it? Do you seriously think that's how it works, boy?" I chuckle at him, as I stand and walk around my desk. I meet him at his side, as he turns towards me.

He seems to have taken offense to my outburst, for now the dark haired boy is staring at me with narrowed eyes. However, I give them right back to him, "Now, why don't you tell me the *reason* you need an increase in pay?" I suggest to him as I only just barely stand taller than him.

The lanky, scrawny boy that first stepped onto *The Hawk* is no more. Instead stands a strong, tall man, who is barely an inch shorter than me, and his size nearly matches mine. He is not longer a boy.

But, I cannot help to give him grief. Our eyes still hold one another, I quirk an eyebrow questioningly to Wheeler, a silent gesture in if he is going to answer my question.

Wheeler takes a moment longer, I'm sure he is mulling over what he is wanting to say in his mind. When finally, his eyes soften and he looks down.

He sighs, "I'm...I'm just afraid of your answer, and your reaction" he states shaking his head.

I let out a heavy sigh as well, I reach forward and place a hand on his shoulder. He turns to look at me after the gesture. Now, seeing his eyes, I can tell that whatever it is on his mind is important, and I need to hear the kid out.

"Just tell me what it is Wheeler, the worse I can say is 'no'" I shrug my shoulders at him as I remove my hand.

Wheeler continues to shake his head, "That's just it, that is the worse answer" he lifts his mouth slightly in a half grin.

I give him another questioning look, "Spit it out Wheeler, you've got to at some point" I state to him, in which he finally nods and takes in a deep breath, "I need a raise...because I need to buy something...for El" he whispers the last part, and at El's name, my eyebrows move to my forehead.

"What's El got to do with this?" I ask, hesitantly this time.

Wheeler finally smiles at me, "I want to get her something, so I can ask her a question" he states plainly, and his words circle around in my head.

Finally, my thoughts narrow in on his intentions. I rise my head slowly and look down at the no longer boy in front of me. I open my mouth to speak, but Wheeler cuts me off.

"I know she means a lot to you" he says earnestly, as he looks up to me, just slightly.

"And...that's why I kind of...wanted to ask you first, that's why 'no' is kind of a scary answer" he says while swallowing.

I nod slowly as I digest his words. I look to the side, and pull my mouth inwards, thinking of the intention behind Wheeler's words.

I turn back to him, "So, you're asking *me*", I say placing a hand on my chest, "If you can ask El, to marry you?" I question him.

Wheeler nods slowly, "Yes, Sir" he answers quietly as he stands silently, awaiting my answer.

I move away from Wheeler in that moment, as I place my hands behind my back and pace slowly. I can feel Wheeler's anxious eyes following me, as his question sits heavily on my shoulders.

After a couple of minutes I place both of my hands on my desk and hang my head downwards, "And what's the pay increase for", I question.

Wheeler clears his throat, "You see, a while ago, the guys, El and I got our ears pierced", as he begins to speak I raise my head slightly to watch the kid.

Wheeler's hand comes up to touch the golden hoop that hangs through his left earlobe, a smile stretches across his face as he recalls the moment.

"And, while there, El and I exchanged a promise with our rings. We promised each other that we would get married, someday" he says quietly.

"We exchanged our rings, and now they hang on our ears, and...I don't want to take them out, so I want to get El something special, and I want to ask her properly. Not like in the dark, dingy blacksmith shop from before", he explains earnestly.

"She's...she's a special girl, and she deserves to be asked properly" he says while our eyes meet again, and I can see the endearment they hold.

I slowly push myself from my desk, and I run a hand over my face and through my hair, I grunt and look back at the boy, who is no longer afraid of me.

I let out a very long sigh, and shake my head slowly. I approach him once again and stand before him, "You promise you'll treat her well, that you will do *anything* to make her happy?" I ask and point a finger to his chest.

Wheeler's eyes widen at my words, his brain registering what I'm

laying down, a wide smile spreads across his face, "Yes...yes of course!" he states wildly.

I nod at him, "Okay then, I'll hold you to that, and if I ever, and I mean *ever* find out you hurt her...you'll be answering to me", I say as I lower my gaze and poke him in the chest.

And at these words, Wheeler seems nervous again, which is good in my book. But, he nods nevertheless and squeaks a "Yes, Sir" to me.

I pull back and finally give him a smile, "Good, I know you'll treat her well kid". I turn towards a chest sitting alone in the corner of my cabin.

I fish around in my lapel for a moment and withdraw a key. I stick it into the chest's lock and pop open the chest.

Inside lays our past and current treasures from our endeavours. I pull out three half crowns. Once finished, I close the chest, lock it, and turn towards Wheeler.

I hold out the coins to him, in which he takes gingerly from my palm. "That's your usual pay, doubled" I state plainly.

Wheeler's eyes go wide at the pay, "Sir, I appreciate the offer, but I didn't-" he starts, but I cut him off, "No, you deserve it kid, and El deserves something nice as well" I tell him giving him a small wink and smile.

Wheeler's smile widens, "Thanks, Hopper" he returns cheekily, and I roll my eyes.

"Now get going kid, I've got stuff to do" I return to my desk and motion for him to leave.

And Wheeler does so, with a skip in his step, and very quickly I'm left alone in my cabin.

As soon as the door closes I let out a long, heavy breath. I run my hand through my hair once again. I approach the one window that sits at the far end of my cabin, and look through it.

Though slightly dirty, I cast my glance around the ship, and my eyes land on El. She is now only talking with Max, and I can't help but allow a grin to spread on my face as I watch them laugh together.

I sigh, as a small tear trickles out of my eye, knowing that I will get to see at least one special girl in my life get married to someone she truly loves.

Current Time

I return from my thoughts as I hear a loud laughing and cheering coming from the docks. I turn my head towards the commotion, and my eyes land on the group of kids, well no longer kids, who changed my life.

El and Mike are holding onto each other like they couldn't survive without the other by their side, while, the others are cheering, joking and jeering at them. Wide smiles are placed on each of their faces.

They walk up the gangplank, two by two now. And once they are aboard the ship, they huddle together once again.

I can't help but watch them in their young giddiness, and I lean against the railing as I observe them.

My eyes land on El, who is holding an array of flowers, and her cheeks are painted red with joy. I marvel a bit at the young girl, and my mind begins to think about what Sarah would have been like, she would be a little older than El.

I continue to watch the young girl, and as if she can feel my eyes on her, she turns her dark eyes towards mine, and we lock.

Her smile falters a little bit, but I raise my mouth into a smile, and once she sees it, hers returns once more.

She turns and grabs Mike's hand, as she pulls him with her towards me. Their smiles seem to never melt away as they approach.

"Hopper!" she calls out, and she all but drags Mike with her. As they now stand next to me, I raise an eyebrow at them, "Hey kids, what's

going on?" I ask with fake suspicion.

El jumps at me as she wraps her arms around my waist, which surprises me, "Mike asked me to marry him!" she cries as she grips onto me.

I finally wrap my arms around the small girl and give her a tight squeeze, her face buried into my chest, I look up at Mike and give him a look, "Oh, he did now?" I ask innocently.

And I watch as the blush forms on Mike's face, and he gives me a small eye roll. El pulls away slightly and beams up to me, "It was so perfect and sweet!" she cries up to me, but then turns her head to Mike, "He's amazing" she sighs, and I all but melt at her sincerity behind her words, knowing that whatever Mike did, it made her happy.

I throw Mike a wink as a 'good job', and he nods in return. El finally pulls away from my embrace and goes to wrap her arms around Mike's waist. He pulls her taught into his side, as he kisses the side of her head.

"We want to get married here" El suddenly bursts out, and I can tell Mike's a bit startled as well. Mike turns to look at her, "You do?" he asks, in which she nods wildly, "Yes, we've waited this long, I want to get married while we are still on land" she gushes.

Mike beams at her, "If that's what you want, then that's what we'll do" he agrees, but then turns towards me again. "Is that okay with you, Hopper?" he asks, unsure.

I look over the two 'adults' and can't help but still seem them as the scrappy group of kids that walked onto the deck all those years ago. And it's hard to believe that they are getting married.

I let out a sigh, "Of course kid" I say as I reach out and ruffle her hair, she laughs at the contact. She looks up at me with those puppy dog eyes, "Will you marry us?" she asks suddenly.

Surprised, my mouth opens in shock, "You...you want to get married on the ship, what about a church or-" But El shakes her head wildly,

"No. I want to get married on this deck, where we fell in love, and I want to be married by the only man who ever truly cared about me" she says as she pulls herself away from Mike and approaches me.

Her eyes are shimmering, and I can't help but feel in awe of this small girl who fell into my life so unexpectedly.

I feel my eyes begin to water slightly, I chuckle, "Of course kid, I'll marry you and Wheeler here" I say with a wide grin as I nod to the boy in question.

El laughs as she launches herself into my arms once again. And it feels as if my daughter is once again in my arms.

Mike's Point of View

Once we are back on the ship, after El said 'yes' to my proposal, it's all I can do to not float on air and to not be a step away from my very soon to be wife and partner.

Our hands are laced together and we hold each other close as we approach the ship, our friends giddy beside us as we walk up the gangplank together.

As we group together once again on the deck, within a couple of minutes I feel El tug at our laced hands as she pulls me away from our friends.

I see immediately who her sights are directed on, as she lets go of my hand and launches a hug at Hopper.

And to my surprise, El is asking Hopper to marry us, and to get married here in Florida nonetheless.

Once we are done discussing with Hopper, El pulls me away once again, I come close to her ear, "Are you sure you don't want to wait till we get back to England, so we can find Joyce, and we can get married there?" I ask the girl beside me, even though I am just as anxious to finally marry this wonderful girl.

El stops slightly, and I do so with her. She stands on her tiptoes to

whisper into my ear, "Of course I would love for Joyce to see us get married, and maybe we can have another ceremony when we get back home, but..." At this she pulls away and gives me a look with dark eyes, she places her hand on my chest, "You *promised* me our wedding night would be at our little oasis, and I plan to hold you to that" she whispers *very* seductively into my ear.

And when she pulls away she quirks a suggestive eyebrow at me, and I feel my blood begin to rush to other places, while my cheeks flare at her words.

I'm awestruck at her forwardness, but I can't help but pull her close to me, in which she squeals as I hold her close.

I kiss the side of her neck and hold my mouth directly to her ear, "And that's a promise, I *definitely* will not break" I growl at her, as she pulls back slightly, our dark, lust filled eyes meeting one another.

El gives me a knowing smile, "And I plan to hold you to it" she states as she pulls at my neck and draws me into a searing kiss, our mouths moving quickly over the other as we try to pull each other closer.

El's Point of View

After we've returned on deck and have exchanged our words with Hopper, Mike and the rest of our friends join each other for dinner, and soon after, Mike and I are once again laying with our heads snuggled up against one another as we exchange soft words into the night.

The next morning, as most of the other seaman have returned to the ship, since it being Sunday, even though we are docked, it is still mandatory for all crew members to return to the ship to attend mass.

Hopper presides over the occasion, and once he is about to wrap up the session in his usual way, the men and the rest of us begin to stir. However, Hopper clears his throat loudly, "I haven't dismissed anyone yet, I have one more announcement" he states.

And groans of displeasure echo across the deck, as we all reseal

ourselves. Once the ship is settled once again Hopper begins, "It's with my great pleasure that I am able to share this announcement" he begins, and at his words, my heart starts to beat rapidly, having a feeling as to what Hopper is about to say.

"As you know, we have a young couple aboard, who, have managed, somehow, to allude many" his head then turns to Mike and I, where, our hands are laced together beside us. And now many eyes and knowing smirks are aimed at us.

"They have announced to me, as of last night, that they are engaged to be married and wish to be married before we set sail!" he says joyfully across the deck, and within moments, the whole crew stands and cheers, and immediately Mike and I are being patted on the back and pulled into hugs by our amazing crewmates.

Hopper waits for everyone to settle down before he continues to speak, "We are planning on departing from Florida in a weeks time, so we will hold the wedding in three days!" he calls out.

Although Mike and I are surprised at the forwardness, we look at each other and shrug, accepting that in three days, we will be married.

"So, I want this ship clean, and spotless in three days time!" he barks out, and the crew barks back a "Yes, Sir!"

"Good, dismissed!" Hopper yells out, and the crew is moving once again, and most are heading in our direction congratulating us and giving us well wishes.

Mike receives a couple of knowing nudges, that makes his face red. As some of our closer crewmates hug and congratulate me.

And before I know it Mike and I are being swept up into the world of planning our quick wedding.

Will's Point of View

After the announcement about the impending wedding has been broadcasted across the ship, and cheers and shouts are heard

probably throughout the whole state of Florida, our small group finally groups together once again.

As I stand about with everyone, it's hard for me to not keep my eyes on El and just taking in her whole being.

I'm honestly in awe of this girl, whom I've known since we were young children, and thinking about her getting married to one of our best friends.

It's even crazier to think about how this whole thing began by us stowing away on this vessel, and now we've come to our next chapter in our lives. But, just standing there and taking in her now seemingly very adult presence is overwhelming, however, exciting as well.

I watch as she grips tightly to Mike, one arm looped around his back, and the other cast over his waist. Her head rests gently against his chest, as one of Mike's arms grips her tightly at her side.

The look of pure love and joy on both of their faces, it's something I had never seen before. Since, my father walked out on my mother and I when I was too young to even remember his face. And El's mother had just passed when we moved into the Brenner household.

So, the look of love, the passion that emits from two people, is extremely foreign to me. And to see the way Mike and El are with each other, it's a new experience that warms my heart.

As I just watch Mike and El, embracing each other in such a simple way, El's eyes shift slightly and catch mine. My eyes widen slightly as our eyes hold onto one another, and I watch as her mouth tuns up slightly in a soft smile. And I can't help but return it, the gesture a small connection between the two of us.

I'm brought out of our moment, when Max suddenly pulls at El's arm and away from Mike, both have looks of displacement from their interrupted contact from one another. As if the world is about to end if they are not a centimeter away from the other.

"Max what-" El tries to get out, but she is immediately cut off by the red head, "You two will have plenty of time to hang off each other in

the coming days, what we need to do is get you a dress" Max states plainly, her eyes sparkling at the other girl.

At this, El's pout turns into a joyous grin, "Yes, definitely!" she cheers to the other girl, Mike seemingly forgotten.

Max turns to Mike, "And you" she points to Mike's dirty white shirt and tattered pants, "Need to find something more presentable too" she scoffs at him.

Mike furrows his brow, "Why, what's wrong with what I have on?" he looks down at himself.

Max rolls her eyes, "Seriously, Mike? Your shirt hasn't been white for ages, and your pants are still ripped from battle. And El isn't going to be making the time to fix all the holes" she says matter of factly.

Mike turns his squinted eyes to Max, and El reaches out gently to squeeze Mike's arm, and his whole face changes in an instant. "Max is right, Mike, you should go with the boys to find something nice" she smiles at him.

And instantly Mike melts, "Alright, for you" he grins, his dovey look earning an eye roll from the rest of us.

"It's settled then, come on El!" Max cheers, as she begins to pull El away, but El stops suddenly looking back at the rest of us, "Wait!" she says somewhat quietly, her eyes land on me, she hesitates slightly, "I...I want Will to come with us too", she says gesturing to me.

I'm taken aback a bit, but I answer, "You do?"

She casts a soft look at me, slowly approaching me, "Yes, of course, I want my brother's opinion too" she says while connecting her arm through mine.

I can't help but return her infectious smile, "Okay, I'll come with you girls then" I say and turn to the other boys whose faces are written with amusement.

I roll my eyes at them, "Hey, it's what you do for sisters" I say shrugging my shoulders, and Mike and Lucas sigh and nod in return,

knowing that they both have sisters at home.

El tugs on my arm and we re-approach Max, El moving to connect her free arm with one of hers, "Let's go!" El shouts as she begins to hurriedly pull us towards the gangplank, and we head out onto the chaotic streets of Florida.

The streets are as busy as they have been since we've arrived back to the bustling state.

El pulls us in different directions as we duck under vendors sheets that hang in front of their shops, as the girls paw through the collections of dresses.

"What about this one?" Max says holding up a long pink dress, that is decorated with an array of sequins and small gems.

El pulls her mouth tight as her eyes observe the material, but she shakes her head, "No, too bright" she says continuing to go through her pile.

I attempt to look through the piles as well, but I have no idea what El's taste is. Remembering back to our childhood where she wore very plain and dignified clothes all the time, thanks to the authority of her father.

El pulls a yellow dress from her pile, "This one?" she questions holding it up to herself, Max shrugs and I quickly shake my head, "Not your color" I comment, and she nods and places it back in the pile.

We've been outside and have visited numerous vendors, and have come up with nothing. El sits down on a nearby curb, a frown placed on her tan face. She sighs, "There's nothing here" she moans.

Max sits beside her and rubs her back, "Don't worry El, we'll find something" Max attempts to encourage.

El sighs again, and I turn to look at the market place, my eyes scanning the shops and mentally exing out the shops we've already visited.

When suddenly a thought hits me, "Hey, El?" I look down to the sitting girl, she turns her face up to me, "Hmmm" she hums at me sadly.

"What about that dress you got, to wear for Mike, where did you get it?" I ask.

And as if I said the magic words, El's eyes light up and her frown flips into a grin, she jumps to her feet, "Oh my gosh, Will, you're a genius!" she throws her arms around me in a tight hug.

I return it, but she quickly ends it as she continues to beam at Max and I, "Madam Char's dress shop, I know we'll find something there!" she exclaimed excitedly as she pulls Max and I with her.

It's not a very long walk to where El is dragging us to. The shop is decorated with bright, floral colors, and when we walk inside, I let out a sigh at the coolness that it permeates.

We are all turning our heads this way and that, marveling at the colors and the intricate clothing that surrounds us.

A voice breaks us out of our thoughts, "Ello, and welcome to Madame Char's!" a woman's voice sing songs to us, as a very tall lady comes to greet us.

She has striking green eyes, and is one of the tallest ladies I've ever seen, I marvel at her for a moment.

Madam Char looks us over, but then she squeals in delight, "Oh, it's my little sailor girl!" she coos as she launches herself at El, who is just surprised as she is picked up off the ground as the woman tightly hugs her.

El awkwardly returns the hug, "Hello, Madam Char, it's good to see you again" El strains through the woman's grip.

Madam Char chuckles lightly as she places El back onto the ground safely, but she gently strokes at El's face. "You have grown even more beautiful than before" she coos at El, who shys away slightly with a red face and a growing smile.

"Thank you, Madam Char" El bows her head slightly in face. Madam

Char then turns her attention to Max and I, "And who are these two lovely faces", she gives us a toothy grin.

"Oh, this is Will, my brother, and Max, she joined the ship with us awhile ago" El answers as she gestures to each of us, and we return 'hellos' to Madam Char.

"How wonderful!" Madam Char says while clasping her hands together, "It's so great to meet, little El's friends!" she gushes over us, and I'm sure Max's face is just as red as mine.

However, Madam Char turns her attention back to El, "What brings you back here little one, how did that last dress work out?" she asks El with a small wink and a knowing tone.

Both Max and I quirk our eyebrows up at El in a teasing way, and I don't think I've ever seen her face that red in my life, and I can't help but let a small laugh escape my lips.

"It uh..." she hesitates slightly, "It, did what it needed to", she blushes even harder, not daring to meet any of our eyes.

Max is desperately trying to hold in her laughter, as her shoulders move up and down, as she covers her mouth with her hand.

"Very good dear, Madam Char's dresses *always* do the trick for any type of man" she gushes. And at this El buries her face in her hands.

And now we are all laughing at poor El, and she groans. "Oh, come now my dear, let us find you a new dress now" Madam Char gestures to El, who has finally emerged from her hands.

El lets out a long sigh, "Yes, please, let's do that" she nods as we follow Madam Char deeper into her shop.

Without turning around she asks, "So, what type of dress are we looking for today, dear?" she asks as we stop in front of a rack.

El smiles shyly, "Uhm, a wedding dress" she says quietly, and Madam Char's eyes widen, she moves to El again and pulls her into another tight hug, "OH, MY DEAR!" she cries as she swings El about.

She places poor El onto the floor, but keeps her hands on her shoulders, "Did your sailor boy ask?" she questions excitedly.

El recovers slightly, and offers a small nod, "Yes, he did, and we're getting married in a couple of days before we set sail for England" she states simply.

Madam Char claps her hands together once again, "My dear girl, then we will find you the perfect wedding dress!" she exclaims as she turns towards her racks as she begins to hastily pull off numerous dresses.

"Here!" she throws a stack of dresses into my arms, in which I'm just barely able to catch before they end up on the floor.

"El, you go in and start trying them on!" Madam Char demands, as she pushes the said girl to the changing area.

I stand nearby as Madam Char reaches into my pile and tosses one to El.

Thankfully, El is quick and steps out in her first dress. The length goes to the floor, but there is a slight slit in the side, that nearly goes up to her thigh. I avert my eyes, "Too revealing!" I state quickly and the other girls laugh.

"Yes, next one!" Madam Char actually agrees as she tosses another dress to El. The next one goes to her knees and is a soft blue in color, it fits her well, but my face scrunches at the overly large, puffy sleeves.

Max seems to read my mind, "No to the sleeves" she shakes her head. "But I like the length!" she adds, and El nods as well, "Yes, let's go with knee length" El agrees, and Madam Char nods, and riffles through the pile in my hand as she withdraws another short dress.

This goes on for awhile, and my arms start to ache from holding up the pile of dresses that Madam Char keeps adding to.

Max eventually lets out a disgruntled sigh, "Ugh, this is taking forever!" she complains after another rejected dress.

And I can see El is deteriorating as well, "Yeah, I just can't seem to

find the right one" she slumps her shoulders in defeat.

As always, I can't stand to see my sister sad. So, I gently place the pile of dresses I'm holding into a nearby chair, and I turn to El. I place a gentle hand on her shoulder, and she looks at me with her soft brown eyes, "El, why don't you look around, pick one that speaks to you" I suggest to the saddened girl.

Madam Char nods vigorously, "Yes, my dear, do as your brother says" she gestures to her shop, and El nods in agreement.

She moves about slowly, her eyes taking in the dresses that surround her, I watch her tentatively until she disappears around the corner. I hear a slight gasp, and El quickly reappears around the corner, something tucked behind her back.

She's smiling wickedly, "I think I found it, but I want you guys to see it on me first" she instructs us, as we nod in agreement as she disappears into the changing room.

"Okay, you guys ready?" she asks from behind the curtain and we simultaneously say "Yes", and then El emerges from behind the cloth, and I can't help but marvel at her beauty.

El's dress hangs just short of her knees, and is made of a soft cotton material and is a blinding white.

The dress ruffles gradually from El's chest to her knees, and it is held onto her shoulder by thin ruffled stings. It flows gently around her as she spins lightly, her face of utter joy.

"El", Max's face is in awe, "It's perfect" she whispers as she looks the girl over. El's eyes land on mind, "Will?" she asks hesitantly.

I approach her with slow steps I take her hand and spin her lightly, "You look absolutely beautiful, El, Mike will drop dead when he sees you in this" I tease her.

And El's face bursts into the widest smile I've seen her have. She turns to Madam Char, "This is the one then" El says happily gesturing to the dress.

Madam Char is crying lightly, "My little sailor girl, you are so beautiful, I'm sure, you and your sailor boy will have *such* beautiful children!" she coos.

And again, El's face is red at the older woman's comment. El turns and changes back into her gear and she pays for her dress, Madam Char cutting her a deal, in which El tries to deny, but the woman insists.

The older woman bids us a teary goodbye, as El gives her one last hug and 'thank you', and we are off once again into the busy streets of Florida.

El is bouncing on her feet in pure joy, and Max and I can't help but mimic her joyous mood.

We are heading back to the ship, when El stops suddenly. Max and I notice her lost presence and we turn towards her, "What's up, El?" Max asks.

El smiles lightly, "There's one more thing I need to get" she states as she nods towards the blacksmiths shop, and Max's eyes widen, "Oh no, I'm not getting my ear pierced today!" she begins to back away.

El laughs and shakes her head, "No, silly, we'd have to do that when we are all together. Thanks to Madam Char, I have some left over money, and I believe it's just enough to get Mike his own ring" she says with a wide smile.

Max and I nod in agreement, as we follow El into the blacksmith shop as she pours over the perfect ring for Mike.

Wow, that chapter was a lot longer than I expected it to be, I really wanted to get to the wedding in this one, but idea's just keep flowing and adding together. But, I hope you liked the new perspectives and enjoyed the change.

And actually my wedding is 10 days from now, so I will really try to get the next chapter out soon, but I also don't want to promise anything just in case because I know we will be extremely busy.

Thank you again for reading! And just like always PLEASE REVIEW! I love reading each and every comment and your feedback!

Till next time!

33. Wedding Bliss

Hey! I'm back finally! I'm so sorry for the delay, but it's been so hectic lately! However, I myself am finally married which is awesome in so many ways, and our day couldn't have gone any better! Let's see if I can give El and Mike the perfect wedding as well!

So, thank you for your patience!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack.

El's Point of View:

Max, Will and I exit from the blacksmith's shop and into the bright sun of Florida that shines down on us fiercely.

However, I pay no notice to the heat or people around me, for my eyes are only focused on the small silver object that lays delicately in my palm.

The sun glints off the piece of silver just right, and I can't help but beam in satisfaction as my heart swells within my chest.

Max and Will eagerly look over my shoulder and admire my purchase. "Wow, look at the way it shines!" Max remarks, slowly reaching out to touch the circular item.

"Yeah El, you choose just right" Will nods in return as he admires the ring within my hand.

I grin at them both widely, "It'll match mine perfectly, silver bands" I say dreamily as I think about how surprised Mike will be once I place the ring on his finger.

I envelop the ring slowly with my fingers and keep the ring pressed against my palm, squeezing it tightly, not wanting it away from my being.

Max pulls on my arm lightly, "Let's head back to the ship, it's almost dinner time and I'm starving" she whines a bit, but I give her a soft

smile.

"Okay Max, lets go" I say as I allow Max to tug me along, Will chuckling along with us.

We approach the ship just as night begins to fall and make our way up the gangplank. We are greeted by many joyous faces who smile knowingly at me, and I can't help but flush at their looks.

I turn to Will, "Can you take the dress and put it into Hopper's cabin? I know it's all wrapped up in parchment, but I don't want Mike to see it before the wedding" I give Will a look.

He rolls his eyes, but his mouth rises slightly, "Yes El, I can do that for you" he says and begins to turn away, but before he gets to far I pull on his arm lightly and place a gentle kiss on his cheek.

His look is of surprisement, as I laugh at him, "Thanks for coming with us today, Will" I say earnestly to the boy.

Will gives me a lopsided look, as he places a gentle hand on his cheek where I had just kissed him, "Yeah...anytime El" he blushes lightly as he turns away from us.

Max giggles after the boy leaves, and we make our way to the mess hall. As soon as we enter, we grab our plates and meal, and we find the boys alright digging into their dinner.

I can't help but beam with joy as my heart flutters lightly as my eyes land on my intended husband.

I feel my cheeks flush lightly as I think about the word *husband* on my tongue and how delicious it will sound when I can finally call him that.

As if he knows I'm looking at him, Mike's dark eyes find mine, and I must be giving him a look because I watch his eyebrows quirk up slightly, and his face flushes red.

"Mike, why is your face red?" Dustin asks the boy unceremoniously, my dark haired boy shakes his head and gives Dustin a scowl and a shove with his shoulder. "Shut up, Dustin, my face isn't red" Mike

growls to the boy, but Dustin doesn't relent.

"Uh, yeah it is" he says with an insinuating tone, as Mike desperately tries to dodge the boys poking, while he is still trying to make eye contact with me. I can't help but laugh at their interaction as we approach the table.

Dustin finally looks up as to where Mike's eyes have been glued to mine and Dustin lets out a loud, "Ohhh, your checking out your bride to be!" he pushes Mike with his hand.

And Mike can only bury his face in his hands as he shakes his head, his dark locks moving every which way as he does so.

I'm laughing as I approach the table and sit down next to Mike, I lean over and peck his cheek, "It's okay Mike, your allowed to look at me you know" I nuzzle into him.

Mike leans his head against mine and sighs, attempting to hide his red face as our friends laugh at him slightly.

The next two days fly by in a blur as the ship has been cleaned from head to toe, and now the decks gleam in the Florida sun, and everything is tucked neatly away.

Max and I have been out picking local flowers on the mainland and we've returned with our baskets full with the exotic blooms.

We couldn't help but marvel at the beauty that this unique land has to offer. We spent a lot more time picking then we allowed ourselves. As we would stop every step or so to take in the delicious scent each bloom expressed.

Max and I are finally climbing the gangplank back on the ship, we are chatting lightly, with smiles on our faces. And I can't help but take a moment to marvel as to how close Max and I have become with one another. I find myself extremely lucky to have another girl on board where I can talk to her about certain things without feeling like I'm the odd one out.

As our feet touch the deck, there are men scrambling about even

more so. Max and I stop in our places and watch as the men move about hastily.

"Make sure those rows are neat!", "You there! That's not where that goes!" a knowing, booming voice echoes across the deck. My head moves in the direction of the voice and I shake my head, but let out a small laugh.

My eyes land on Hopper who is standing above the rest of the men, his dark eyes following each and everyone of their movements like a hawk.

I nod my head slightly to Max for her to follow me, and she does so as we walk towards the Captain.

He's still bellowing out orders as I tilt my head upwards to yell up to Hopper, "Hey, Hopper!" I call, and I watch as his head turns quickly to my voice.

His stern face softens lightly as he spots Max and I waving up to him, "El, Max" he nods back, but very quickly he turns back to barking a crew member who has placed a bench just slightly cockeyed from the others.

"Hopper, what do you think of the flowers?" I call up to him. Hopper's head turns back to me, I hold up my basket of colorful flowers for him to see, he looks at them with squinted eyes, "They look great El, where do you want them?" he smiles down at me, and I can't help but return one to him.

I shake my head slightly, "It's okay Hopper, Max and I will place the flowers" I say to him.

Hopper opens and closes his mouth, "But-" he starts but I cut him off, "Don't worry Hopper, I want to contribute to my wedding day as well!" I chirp up to him.

I watch as Hopper lets out a long sigh, "Okay El, go ahead" he says waving his hand to us girls, as he turns back to his yelling at the poor crewmembers.

Max and I turn excitedly as we begin to place the flowers

methodically about the ship.

Within a short amount of time, Max and I have the ship covered head to toe in colorful, exotic flowers. We both step back to admire our handiwork.

Max turns towards me with a wide smile, "Can you believe it?! In less than twenty-four hours, you and Wheeler will be married!" she chuckles.

Slowly, I take in Max's words, and the whole thing sinks in on me in one fell swoop. My stomach quickly becomes knotted and my breath catches in my throat.

I must be making a face because Max's grin falls away, and her eyes widen in alarm, she places both of her hands on my shoulders, "Whoa, El, are you okay?" she asks gently.

My brain allows me to nod my head, as my mouth hangs open slightly, "Uh, um, yeah...I'm okay" I swallow hard.

Max's bright blue eyes search mine, and her mouth grows into a small grin, "El" she whispers as she moves one of her hands and brushes a stray hair away from my face, "Everything will be fine, tomorrow will be perfect" she reassures me.

My dark eyes finally register on hers after I am pulled out of my stupor. I let Max's calm demeanor wash over me, I take in a long deep breath and close my eyes as I exhale.

Our eyes meet again, as I allow a smile on my face, "You're right, everything will be fine" I whisper, and at this Max lets out a sigh of relief.

"Okay, good, I thought I lost you there for a second" she jokes as she swings an arm over my shoulder as we begin to walk towards the rail of the ship.

She lets go of my shoulder as we both look over the railing as we watch the sun begin to lower. It's close to sunset, and the horizon is quickly changing colors, I gaze upon the sky in amazement, sighing at the calming sensation it pours over me.

Just as I am beginning to relax I hear a call over my shoulder, "El!", the voice is unmistakable to my ears, I turn with a grin on my face as I watch my very soon to be husband comes rushing over to Max and I with the other boys in turn.

He begins to slow his pace as he approaches me, and I can't help but throw my arms around him, which seems to surprise Mike slightly as he stumbles at my embrace.

My arms are wrapped tightly around his neck, as I pull my body flush against his. I hear him chuckle into my hair as he wraps his long arms around my waist and pulls me in just as tight.

"What's this for?" he asks with a light chuckle. I linger in the moment for just a beat more before I lightly pull away, his dark eyes meet mine, and his freckled face smiles back.

My heart swoons over his being, as I shake my head lightly, "Nothing, just...wanted to hug you is all" I whisper sweetly up to him.

Mike softens a bit as he raises a hand to brush back my hair, it takes him a moment but he finally speaks, "I can't wait to see you tomorrow in your dress, you're going to be stunning" he says softly.

I let out a light huff, "It is a pretty amazing dress" I tease at him. He rolls his eyes at me, "Tomorrow...can't come soon enough" he breathes towards me, as he searches my face.

My eyes move across his face as well, if we actually had a long moment, I wish I could count the freckles that are scattered about his light face.

My eyes finally stop moving and land directly into his. And if it's even possible, I watch them darken more, and I can see the desire in his eyes.

He begins to move down towards me, and I feel myself reacting to him, as my eyes flutter shut and I stand on my tiptoes to bring myself closer, when a very annoying voice interrupts us.

"Ugh, seriously you guys, you have all tomorrow to get all...gushy with one another" Dustin scrunches his face towards us, as Mike and I

have pulled away from each other.

We both roll our eyes at our curly haired friend, Mike opens his mouth to speak, but he's quickly cut off by our fiery red head, "Dustin's got a point, you two need to separate from each other for the night and you can't see the other till tomorrow" she wags a finger between the two of us.

I let out a sigh of defeat, "Okay, fine, we will separate for the night" I huff in annoyance as I break away from Mike, whose face falls at our lack of contact.

I give him an apologetic look, as my heart breaks at his saddened look. And his shoulders slump as he sighs too.

Max begins to pull at my arm, "Come on El, Hopper already said we could sleep in the sick bay again for the night, I've got your dress and everything else in there, ready to go" she states.

I give her a quick nod, "Okay, thanks Max", I turn back to Mike, who looks like he wants to say something, but Dustin and Lucas each grab onto one of his arms, "Yeah, come on Mike, it's time for a guys night!" Lucas cheers in which Dustin and Will cheer in on as well.

Mike and I lock gaze once more, I can't help but smile at our friends antics and shrug my shoulders at him, he gives me a soft look, "I'll see you tomorrow El, this is the last time I will see you as my fiance, and tomorrow...I'll get to see you as my wife" he speaks softly the last words, and I can't help but melt.

His face says it all, and I can't help but break away from Max's grip, as she shouts "Hey!" behind me, I rush towards Mike, in which Dustin and Lucas break their grip on Mike's arm.

I throw myself into Mike's awaiting arms, as he spins me in a circle. I squeal in delight as he spins us, however, he stops quickly and places me back onto the deck, our heads are close, and I can't help but dive in and place a fierce kiss on his waiting lips, in which he eagerly returns.

I feel his intensity as his arms wrap around me tightly, and his fingers

dance around my back. I swoon, and melt into his embrace as our lips dance together.

We break away slowly, our breathing heavy, as we both let out small chuckles, "I just couldn't allow one last kiss before we become husband and wife tomorrow" I admit sheepishly as my cheeks are stained red.

Mike nuzzles my nose against his, "Trust me, I'm not complaining" he smiles at me. We lean in once again, however, rough arms begin to pull us apart.

"Come on you two! You are ridiculous!" Max cries behind me as she successfully pulls me away from Mike's embrace.

Mike and I burst out into laughter as our friends pull us apart. Mike throws out his arms in a wild gesture, "I love you!" he cries out dramatically with a grin plastered against his face.

I chuckle at his dramatization, but I can't help but follow along, as I throw my arms out as well, "I love you more!" I cry out, and at this even our friends can't help but laugh at our antics. We are pulled away from each other, the ship dividing us until tomorrow.

The harsh sun hits my face, and I raise my hands sleepily to block the sun's rays. I slowly raise my body up from my cot and I stretch my arms high above my head.

I turn my head to see Max who is splayed out on her cot. Her deep red hair splayed in all directions, I shake my head at the sight.

When suddenly, realization hits me: I'm getting married today.

At this, my heart begins to beat wildly and my stomach twists in excitement and anxiousness.

I stand from my cot and make my way over to the nearest window. The sun has broken over the horizon, and its rays are casting a dull, pastel color into the sky.

I sigh, marveling at the sight, and a smile dances its way onto my

face, as I cannot wait for the days excitement.

A rustling behind me, and a very loud yawn turns my attention back to my roommate. Max's hair is a bit static from sleep, and it stands in all directions, I can't help but laugh at the sight.

Max grumbles at me, as she rubs sleep from her eyes, "Yeah, and you look like sleeping beauty" she shoots at me.

She stands from her cot, and stands next to me, we both turn to look back out the window.

We are silent, taking in the morning light, when Max finally breaks the silence, "You ready?" she asks me simply.

I process her words quickly in my head, but my heart answers before it even had a chance to process, "I've always been ready" I smile to my redheaded friend. Max returns the smile and she nods back towards our beds.

"Come on, let's get cleaned up, and you ready for your big day" she raises her eyebrows to me, and I excitedly follow her as we begin to get ready.

Mike's Point of View:

I'm in a deep sleep when I feel myself moving erratically, and quite quickly too. My brain believes I am still asleep, however, my body is becoming aware of my bodies movements.

My eyes finally shoot open, as I find myself desperately grasping onto the side of my hammock, that is swinging violently from side to side.

"What the-!" I try to get out, but three loud cheering and laughing voices interrupt my voice, "COME ON MIKE, UP AND AT'EM!" Lucas calls from one end of the hammock.

"YEAH COME ON MIKE, IT'S YOUR WEDDING DAY!" Dustin cries out.

I'm starting to feel sea sick, literally, as I desperately try to cry out,

"OKAY! I'm up, stop guys, I'm going to be sick!" I shout to my annoying *friends*. Who finally let go of my hammock, still laughing, as I allow it to settle.

Once the hammock is still enough, I expertly climb out of it, and my feet hit the cold floor, I'm still a little disoriented from the rocking, so I stumble on my feet.

Dustin, Lucas and Will are bent over laughing at my state. I roll my eyes at them, as I throw them a finger in disgust. I make my way towards the head, where I intend to clean up, their laughter follows me.

"Aw, come on Mike, we were just playing with you" Dustin catches up to me. Lucas hand sharply slaps me on the back, I wince at the impact and shoot him a dirty look, "Dustin's right, we were just trying to wake you, so that you weren't late for your own wedding" Lucas teases.

I huff at them as we all make our way towards the head. Since it's a special occasion, there have been numerous brass tubs placed about the head that are filled with lukewarm water.

I turn to the guys, "I'm going to get cleaned up, I need to look good for today, why don't you guys go get breakfast?" I shoot them a look.

The guys roll their eyes at me, "Whatever you say, m'lord" Dustin fakes an accent and bows towards me, I swat at his head, in which he grumbles at, but soon, we are all laughing.

The guys leave me in piece, as I strip down and get into the lukewarm water. There are bars of soap strung about, and I pick one that has yet to be used.

I place it in the water and work up a good lather as I roughly scrub at the dirt and sweat that has caked to my body. We are lucky to get one bath a month while at sea.

Us sailors tend to grab a bucket of sea water and we will wash our hair in the buckets on a weekly occasion. However, a full body bath, especially in a tub is a blessing.

After I finish with my body, I scrub at my hair, which, although is long, it curls in all directions, making it grow more in width than it does length.

But, as El has told me numerous times, as we lay tangled together and her delicate fingers lace through my locks, that she loves my curly hair and she hopes our kids have just as curly.

I blush at the thought, as I wash my hair methodically in the water, making sure it is no longer dirty.

Once I am clean, I grab a nearby cloth and dry off, and I begin to pull on my new sanctioned uniform in which I aim to where today.

After the battle, most of our uniforms were left either tattered or covered in blood. Hopper, thankfully had allowed all the sailors to be issued new coats.

The guys and I had searched out a new white undershirt for myself to where, so that I don't sweat too bad and staining my new uniform coat before the wedding.

I'm cinching up my belt, and tossing my white shirt over my still wet hair when I hear someone clearing their throat behind me.

I turn quickly to the source, and settle when I see Will, who too has cleaned up and is wearing the underlings to his uniform. I give him a smile, "Hey Will, what's up?" I say over my shoulder as I button up my front.

Will approaches me slowly, but doesn't speak, this isn't uncommon to my younger friend, but in this moment it feels awkward, I finally turn my attention to him.

"Will?" I ask slowly, my face scrunching in confusion. The smaller boy holds his hands behind his back as he shifts between his feet.

He opens his mouth to speak, our eyes meet, and he closes his mouth, unsure.

I approach Will carefully, he refuses to meet my eyes, "Will, is everything okay?" I ask him seriously.

Will lets out a long breath, and finally his light eyes meet mine, he opens his mouth again, "I...I uh.." he stutters.

I can tell he's nervous, so I cast him a small smile, "Will, you know you can talk to me right?" I ask him, in which he nods in return.

"I know, Mike, it's just...weird" he shakes his head. I give him another confused look, "What's weird?" I ask him.

Will lets out another long breath, "I...I wanted to talk about El and..." he falters, I nod at him to continue.

"And..." I try to push him along. Will closes his eyes sharply and lets out in one breath, "Ijustwantedtotellyoutonothurtherr!" he blathers quickly.

My eyes shoot open in astonishment as I try to asses his words, but I only caught pieces. I chuckle lightly, "Will, what about El?"

Will lets out a frustrated breath, "It's just...it's just...El's been like a sister to me and....and I just don't want to see her get hurt, not by anyone" he says so softly, I have to strain to hear him, but this time, his words sink in.

It's my turn to let out a breath, and I approach him slowly, Will winces slightly as I approach, "I don't want you to be mad at me" he blabbers out, as I stop in front of him.

I look at the brown haired boy and take him in, and I can see that he's afraid, that he is afraid to say this to me, because we are friends, yet, El is his sister.

He's evaluating me, and I'm sure he believes I'm going to yell at him, but instead, I place a hand on his shoulder, and our eyes lock, "Will, I promise you, with every piece of my being, in any way, shape or form, I would *never* hurt your sister, nor would I let *anyone* hurt her" I say as passionately, but seriously as I can.

At my words, Will's eyes widen in shock, but then slowly his face softens and he nods slowly, "I know you'd never hurt her Mike, I just...thought this day would come later, and not this soon" he admits.

I squeeze his shoulder, and he looks back at me, I give him a smile, "She was so lucky to have you, and she still is, you will *always* be her brother first" I state genuinely. And I watch as Will's eyes water slightly and soon he wraps me in a hug, which startles me at first, but I slowly return.

We pull away and chuckle awkwardly, "Well" Will begins as we stand in place, "Shall we go get ready on deck?"

I give him a nod and a smile, "Yes, lets go" I state as we head up on deck, where all of our crewmates are seated and ready for the ceremony.

All eyes land on Will and I as we approach from the underdeck. And in this moment, my stomach begins to turn a bit in nervousness. As we both head to the front of the deck where Hopper stands waiting, a smile plastered on his face as our eyes meet.

I stand next to him, as Will, Lucas and Dustin stand by my side. "Ready kid?" he asks in his deep voice.

I let out a harrowing sigh and nod, "Yeah, definitely ready" I state, as Will and I pull on our black uniform jackets, and button them up just right. Will turns towards me, "Well, I'll go grab El", he states as he puffs out his chest slightly.

I chuckle at his display of proudness he has, I pat him on his back, "She's lucky to have you" I tell him earnestly. Will smiles at this comment, as he heads down the stairs towards the sick bay where El and Max are waiting.

He opens the door and disappears inside. After a few moments Mr. Powell pokes his head in for a few minutes, and shuts the door. He signals up to Hopper.

Hopper nods to Mr. Powell as he raises a hand to signal the crewmembers who had offered to play as El walked down the aisle. At his signal, they begin to play a light and melodious tune.

My eyes fall on the back of the ship, right where the sick bay lays. We are standing at the helm of the ship, so we are up high and I get a

perfect view of the door, just as it slowly begins to open.

Max steps out first, she looks very nice, with her hair pulled up slightly, and a light green dress brushes against her knees. I steal a quick look at Dustin, who looks like his eyes are about to burst out of his head.

Once Max has made it about halfway down the aisle, I feel my heart stop beating as the door opens, and my eyes widen at the beautiful sight before me. I forget how to breath.

El's Point of View

Hopper has had a couple of the crewmembers bring in two brass tubs, in which were slowly filled with lovely, steaming water.

Max and I are given a delicious smelling soap that is different then the plain white soap we are usually given.

Once we are alone, both Max and I sigh as we each get into our own tubs. Max lets out a long sigh of pleasure as she sinks deeper into the basin.

I laugh at her as she dips her head beneath the soapy water, and I do the same.

She reappears from the soapy froth, "This is amazing!" she groans in happiness as she sits back and enjoys the warmth of the water around her.

"Yeah, you're lucky to be getting this, lukewarm baths are usually only once a month while at sea, and then you've got to share them with the other crewmembers" I scrunch my face in disgust.

"That's why I always just got my own bucket to clean up in" I remark as I begin to take the sweet smelling soap and lathering up my body.

Max chuckles, "Well, then, I'm going to enjoy it" she states matter of factly as she sits and lightly floats in the basin.

I begin to wash at my hair, desperately trying to get all of the sweat,

dirt and even old blood out of my hair. Although, most of us have washed from the battle, you never truly get it all out in a bucket of water.

However, after I have lathered up my hair I take a comb that I had purchased a while ago, and begin to untangle the knots that have formed within my hair.

I wince as I pull the dreaded knots through the combs teeth, but I want my hair to be perfect for today.

I glance over to Max, who is doing the same thing. I am slightly envious of her because her hair is so straight, and not curly like mine. Knots seem to easily dissipate the second she runs the comb through her hair. I huff in annoyance.

However, once we are both cleaned, we dry ourselves off and we dress in our underwear and underdresses.

Max is methodically drying my hair to a state of decency, and once she has accomplished that, she begins to tackle my long, curly hair.

After what seems like a short while I hear her huff behind me, "You have too much hair" she states so plainly, I let out a light laugh.

"Why do you think I keep it up most of the time?" I joke to her. "Heh, well, once *I* get done with it, you'll look amazing, and Mike won't be able to help and stare....and maybe think of something *else*" she teases.

At her words I blush, thinking of what is to come tonight, my stomach flutters with excitement, but nerves as well.

I feel Max tug and pull at my hair as she twists it this way and that and holds it in place with small pins she acquired yesterday.

After what feels like an eternity I let out a long breath, "Are you almost done?" I ask impatiently.

"One more curl!" she says tiredly, as I feel her twist one more loop as she places it with a pin.

"There!" she cries out happily, clapping her hands together.

A smile creeps onto my face, "Let me see!" I ask excitedly as I gesture towards the mirror.

Max quickly hands over the device to me, I take in a deep breath, as I slowly look into the mirror and I can't help but gasp in astonishment.

Max has managed to tame my wild hair, as she has set it back in loose curls pinned not too tightly to the back of my head, as a couple loose curls hang about.

"Do you like it?" she asks somewhat nervously, I turn back to her with a huge grin, "Max, it's perfect!" I cry out to her in honesty, in which Max relaxes at my words, "Good, I'm glad you like it, because now you get to do mine!" she cries excitedly.

I roll my eyes at the girls antics, but we switch spots as I begin to attack her hair, wanting to make it just as perfect as mine.

Soon, after our hair is done up, and a light layer of makeup is placed on both of our faces, Max laces me up into my dress.

"There!" she exclaims as she finishes the knot behind me. I turn and spin a bit, "How do I look?" I ask a little nervously. Max only shakes her head, "You look absolutely beautiful El, Mike's not going to know what hit him" she jokes.

There is a quiet knock on the door, we both stop and Max approaches the door, it's Will, "Can I come in?" he asks hesitantly, "Of course, we're all ready" she says excitedly as she lets Will in.

Will shifts in through the door, and his eyes immediately land on me, his mouth forms an 'O'. I feel my cheeks blush slightly, "How do I look?" I question the boy.

A smile dances onto his face slowly, he shakes his head, "Wow, El, just...wow!" he says breathlessly.

I chuckle at him as I reach out my arms and pull him into a hug, "Thanks for doing this" I whisper into his ear.

Will pulls away slightly, "Of course El, I'm glad you asked me" he smiles happily at me.

Soon, another knock is heard on the door, Max answers it again, this time it's Mr. Powell, "Are you ladies ready?" he asks.

Max turns towards me, and I nod in response, "Yes, I believe we are" she smiles at Mr. Powell, who returns the gesture, "I will let everyone know then. You know to come out as the music begins right?" he double checks.

We all nod, and he says "Good!" and he disappears once again. Max heads over to a table we had taken over and picks up two small bouquets we made up of spare exotic flowers.

She hands one to me and gives me a beautiful grin, and then, the music starts to play. My breath catches in my throat, and both Max and Will give me a knowing look, "You'll be fine El, you've got Will if you need him" Max nudges Will in the side and throws me a wink, as she heads towards to the door.

She opens it and disappears behind it. Will and I approach it slowly, Will looks out the small window on the door, "Okay, she's halfway, ready?" he asks as he throws up his elbow for me to hold onto to.

I give him a gracious grin, as I accept his elbow gently with my hand, and hold my bouquet between us.

I let out a nervous breath and whisper a shaky "Ready", and Will opens the door.

The sun is bright after being inside for most of the day and I squint until my eyes adjust.

As we step aside the door, I hear a round of gasps as all eyes are on me. I can feel everyone's stares and open mouths gaping at me.

I begin to feel nervous as I squeeze onto Will, as if he can feel my apprehension, he moves closer towards me and whispers, "Look at Mike".

I do as he says and cast my eyes forward, and I can't help but let a smile play out onto my mouth and a sigh of relief leaves me.

There, at the top of the deck awaits the one person who calms my fears in every sense and form. Our eyes meet, even though we are a ways away from each other.

His eyes widen as he takes me in, and his mouth opens just as Will's did, but there's something different about his look. For, his eyes hold that of true love, of wanting and waiting, and my heart melts as I zone in on him, and only watch him as Will walks me down the aisle.

As if everything is moving in slow motion, I can hear the gentle music swelling around us, and we are finally climbing the steps to the helm.

We make our final approach to the altar, and not once, do Mike and I break eye contact.

And then, we are standing but an arm's length apart, his mouth twitches into his dopey smile I so love, and his shoulders relax.

Hopper's booming voice makes us break eye contact as we turn to him. "Welcome all!" he starts raising his hands out to the crowd, "To this joyous occasion we are all too lucky to witness" he brings his hands back down and looks between Mike and I.

"Will, do you give your blessings to your sister and accept Mike into your family?" Hopper asks the boy beside me.

Will nods enthusiastically, "Yes, I do" he says and takes my hand gently and reaches it towards Mike, who reaches forward as well, and we interlace our fingers together.

I turn and hand Max my bouquet of flowers so that I may take Mike's other hand. We stare into each other's eyes.

I can't help but melt looking at him, and taking in his handsome appearance. His hair is perfectly curly and flies about in every direction. And he is clean from head to toe and stands proudly in his dark uniform, I swoon slightly.

Our attention is brought back to Hopper who has begun to speak again, "We have watched these two grow together, although not knowingly as boy and girl till not too long ago" he throws each of us a wink. "But, we did watch their relationship form at a young age of committed friends, which blossomed into the beautiful thing in which we call love" he smiles down at us.

"Now, as you have each stated, you'd like to share words with one another?" he questions us, and we both nod in agreement.

"Mike would you like to begin?" Hopper turns to my curly haired boy, who now seems a little nervous, but he nods in acceptance. He turns back towards me with that dopey smile.

Mike's Point of View

I'm taken aback a bit when Hopper asks me to begin, as the flurry of butterflies swell within my stomach. However, one look at El, in her beautiful white dress, and seeing her with her hair and makeup done just right and a long deep breath in, I know what I want to say to her.

I grip her hands tightly, "El" I begin, my voice shaking, "You...are the most beautiful woman to have ever graced my sight" and at these words I watch as her eyes begin to water.

"The first day I met you, I knew...I just knew there was something special between us" I breath. "You were so kind, so caring and so willing to just be a friend, and I especially needed that after feeling like everything had been ripped away from me".

I pause and just marvel at her, "But, then something began to grow between us, and I couldn't understand what it was. At first, I thought it was just some brotherly feeling, but then something continued to grow, and...it scared me" I tell her honestly.

"I became lost again, and....I pushed you away, which today....is my greatest regret, because you never deserved that" I shake my head to her.

"When I finally realized what the feeling inside of me actually was, I

accepted it, and I was ready to abandon ship, and then, you changed everything" I laughed.

"You trusted me with your secret, and just as I had believed I felt and hoped to God you felt too, and you told me you were a girl" I shrugged my shoulders.

"And I couldn't believe how incredibly lucky I was to have fallen so deeply in love with someone like you" I whisper and I watch as a silent tear made its way down her cheek.

"You became everything and more to me in so many ways, and you were always there, no matter what. I can't wait to see what life has in store for us. I just hope we get a moment of calm and not a sea of monster hunting after us" I chuckle as does El and most of the crew.

"El", I whisper and reach out to wipe away her tear, "You are my everything and I cannot wait to take this next journey of life with you" I say as my own tears begin to travel down my face.

El's crying now, softly, but a smile never leaves her face, her eyes glisten up to me and she says, "Thank you, Mike" and I smile back in return.

"El?" Hopper's voice breaks us out of our small moment, in which El nods and turns towards me, she takes in a deep breath and begins her sentiments.

El's Point of View

I'm desperately trying to hold myself together so that I don't become a blathering mess of tears. Because just as Mike had professed his beautiful sentiments, I want to make sure he receives mine clearly as well.

I take in a deep breath and begin, "Mike, what is there to not say about you?" I begin and glimmer a beaming smile up at him.

I sniffle a little bit, "When I first met you on this ship, I too, felt an instant connection, and I just wanted to be close to you, but, little did I know why".

"It was the little things at first, the way you cared about your friends, the way you were so passionate about what you did, and that smile....it was always there and it always made it into my dreams" I say softly.

"Just like you, I began to feel something change between us, and although I couldn't come out and tell you so soon, my feelings and my heart continuously beat for you, and my longing grew".

"I had wished everyday I could tell you, and I had hoped you had felt the same way" a tear travels down my cheek. "And I wish I had told you sooner".

"But, finally that day came, where you said you were going to leave the ship, and I just knew, either I tell you and you feel the same, or you were going to rat me out to Captain Hopper" I chuckle, and so does Mike.

"But, I was so lucky, because you felt the same, and you kissed me, and told me that you loved me, and I felt like everything was complete" another tear streamed down my face.

"I'm so utterly in love with you, and am the luckiest person on earth to be able to have someone like you love me in all the ways you do. Especially with how much you show me, with your hugs, your warmth and kindness".

"Mike" I blink up at him, as a his eyes now glisten with tears, "I love you, with all my heart, and I cannot wait to spend the rest of my life with you" I whisper to him, and he gives me a watery smile.

"Thank you" he whispers to me, and I duck my head in shyness.

I hear a soft sniff and both Mike and I whip our heads over to Hopper, who is trying to hold back his tears, Mike and I chuckle through our own.

"Uh, yes well, that was beautiful you two, now the rings" he gestures to Dustin and Max, both Mike and I receive the rings.

When Mike turns back he gives me a questioning look as he sets his eyes on the silver band in my hand, I just shoot him a wink and he

shakes his head in amusement.

"Mike, repeat after me" Hopper states, and Mike looks me in the eyes with the warmest look. "I Michael Wheeler give you, Eleanor, this ring" Hopper begins.

"I Michael Wheeler give you, El, this ring" he gives me a wink for not using my full name, Hopper rolls his eyes but continues, "as a symbol of my commitment".

"As a symbol of my commitment", Mike repeats, "to love, honor and always cherish you".

"To love, honor and always cherish you" Mike says as he delicately slides my beautiful ring onto my finger.

Hopper turns to me, "Now El, repeat after me. I, Eleanor Brenner give you, Michael, this ring" he starts.

I smile as I attempt to repeat Hopper, "I, El Brenner, give you, Mike, this ring" Mike and I can't help but giggle at Hopper's deep sigh.

"As a symbol of my commitment" he says, "As a symbol of my commitment" I repeat.

"To love, honor and always cherish you", Hopper finishes. "To love, honor and always cherish you" I say softly as I slide Mike's ring onto his finger, and I hold my breath, as the ring slips on and fits without a doubt.

Mike and I lace our fingers together.

"Now, that you have exchanged vows and rings, comes the best part" Hopper bellows and Mike and I are grinning fools.

"By the power vested in me by the King of England, aboard this vessel, I can now officially pronounce you husband and wife!" he bellows, as Mike and I don't take our eyes off of each other.

"You may kiss your bride!" Hopper cheers, and without a second of hesitation, Mike gently pulls on me and our mouths meet in a delicious kiss.

Mike's arms wrap delicately around my waist, as my arms wrap around his neck. I bring his mouth closer to mine, as our tongues taste each other briefly.

And then, we pull away, our hearts full. Hopper bellows out, "It is my great pleasure to finally introduce for the first time, Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler!"

And at the declaration, the whole crew stands and cheers wildly. Confetti is thrown this way and that at us as we stand just holding onto one another, blissfully in love.

Mike pulls me close once again as he whispers, "I love you, El Wheeler", I grin ear to ear to him and whispered back, "I love you, Mr. Wheeler" and as our eyes search each others faces, I pull him back down into a searing kiss, as our crewmates celebrate and cheer around us.

Oh my god, I finally got it done! I'm soooooooo sorry it took forever and thank you for your patience it's greatly appreciated! Just got so busy after the wedding and have a paper and project due in a couple of weeks! But, there are only a couple chapters left :(so I will hopefully have more time at the end of August and have another chapter out soon!

Thank you again for reading and your lovely reviews! Let me know what you thought of the wedding chapter! I hope it was good!

As always PLEASE REVIEW! Thank you!

34. The Oasis

Ah! Finally back! Sorry again for another long wait! Had to finish up a paper and project for this week, but those are now done and finally got the okay for my internship sight, yay! So, my schedule is going to become even more crazy and chaotic and I want to make sure I finish this story up in the way it deserves.

Thank you all again for the wonderful congratulations! I can't believe it's been a month already! But, your gratitude is so appreciated along with your wonderful reviews!

Anyways, I know you want me to get onto this next part of the story!

Warning: Lemon (But Mild) Tried to keep it as innocent as possible!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack.

Mike's Point of View:

It feels as if everything is moving in slow motion as I hold El tightly against me as our lips meld together into one. The heat exhuming from both of us is overwhelming, but it makes me pull her closer to me, not being able to get her close enough.

The cheers around us are muffled in my ears, for in this moment all I can feel, hear and breathe is El. And I'm pretty sure my heart is about to burst from my chest in this overwhelming moment.

I let out a soft moan into El's mouth as they continue to dance with one another. And I feel El's gentle lips smile against mine as she giggles slightly, finally pulling away, but only slightly, as we remain only a breath apart.

Her shimmering eyes lock onto mine, and her smile melts my heart all over again. She chuckles lightly again as she shakes her head at me. I quirk an eyebrow up at her, "What?" I ask her teasingly.

She laughs lightly, "Just the way you're looking at me, it's breathtaking" she admits, and I can't help but nuzzle her head up against mine.

"I can't help but admire my beautiful *wife*" I breathe into her face as I place a gentle kiss on her awaiting lips.

She sighs greatly and wraps her arms around my neck, "I have a very endearing *husband*" she coos back at me, and then I'm picking her up and spinning her in my arms, her beautiful laugh ringing against my ear.

I set her back down and I'm about to swoop back in to kiss her, when two other arms wrap around each of our shoulders, pulling us apart, "You've got enough time to do that later, let's celebrate!" Dustin's curly hair spills around both of our heads.

And as Dustin shouts out, the rest of the crew returns the cheer. I sigh heavily, but El is laughing at Dustin's antics, she pats his chest lightly, "Okay, okay, Dustin, we will behave", she throws a wink my way and I feel my cheeks light up slightly.

Dustin turns us to the crowd and he lifts his head up to the sky and shouts, "LET'S CELEBRATE!" and I want to cover my ears to his loud cracking voice, but instead I just shake my head and join in.

The group of seaman who had graciously volunteered to play during the ceremony take this as their cue, and they begin to play a more upbeat tune, as Dustin pulls us to the main deck.

The seaman on the main deck quickly and eagerly move the benches out of the way to open up the deck for dancing. And, within moments just about everyone on deck steps in and begins their own movements as they sway and step to the movement.

Everyone is laughing and cheering as El and I are swept up into the music. We lock eyes with each others, and give each other shy smiles as we move together, however, El's eyes go wide, as a hand behind her grabs onto hers and she is quickly swept away by an eager Steve.

"Come on El, let me show you some moves!" he shouts as everyone

begins to move in a coordinated movement to the quick Irish jig.

El shoots me a look of uncertainty but I cast her a hand to not worry. I watch as a small smile perks onto her face, and she moves in to dance with Steve, attempting to copy his wild, but coordinated movements.

I move off to the side, where the chef has set up a spread of meats, fruits and small desserts that he has obtained from the island. And for me it is a welcome sight, as I reach the table and choose a freshly shucked oyster and tip it back into my throat.

I watch amusedly to the sailors who are dancing. It surprises me as to how coordinated most of them are, and how steady they are between their movements.

The song has changed, still more upbeat, but one of the members has pulled out his fiddle, and he is playing a song that is quick and jaunty. So, the pace of the dancers doesn't change.

As the song begins to fade however, I catch El, who seems out of breath from dancing with Steve. She thanks him with a curtsy, and he a bow. And as if she can feel my eyes on her, we lock gazes. She throws me a tired smile but nods me towards her.

I return the nod, and begin to make my way towards her. But, again as we are merely an arms length away, the song changes into a song I recognize as a more country tune in which follows a particular movement.

El and I reach out our hands, but instead of finding one another, Max grabs onto mine, and Will grabs El, and we are whisked away in opposite directions.

"Max!" I huff at the redhead, whose face is as red as her hair from her smiling and dancing. She gives me a warm look, "What?" she asks curiously, I roll my eyes, "I was trying to dance with my wife" I say sadly.

Max's eyes go wide but then she laughs, "I'm sorry Mike, I saw your hand reaching out and I just took it" she says loudly over the music

and cheers of the other seaman.

We are dancing to the music and falling in sync with the other dancers, when Max pulls me roughly, "Come on casanova, lets get you to your girl!" she shouts to me as she dances along with me, unceremoniously through the crowd as we attempt to find El.

We bump into other members of the crew who scowl slightly at us, both Max and I cast our looks here and there attempting to spot the coveted girl.

When finally I see the flash of her gorgeous white gown, my brain goes on autopilot, "Over there!" I choke out, pulling Max along ungraciously.

We attempt to keep up with the movements, until we finally catch up with El and her new dance partner who is Lucas.

"El!" I call out as she spins with our dark haired friend. At her name, El spins her head and our eyes meet, she gives me a soft look and nods.

I watch as she whispers into Lucas's ear, who turns to spot Max and I. He smiles and nods. "Ready Max?" I ask the red headed girl, who nods eagerly, "Ready!" she states.

And just as the song peaks and everyone spins about to change partners, mine and El's eyes lock together as we swing just right, and *finally*, I grab ahold of her and pull her tight to me.

We spin in a circle together laughing. Her head falls into my neck as we move to the music. "Oh my gosh, that was a process!" she giggles as she looks up to me.

I give her a small kiss on her forehead, "Nothing will ever keep me away from you" I whisper down to her, in which she casts me a brilliant smile.

"Mike" she says quietly back, and I notice that the music has changed to a very slow and mellow pace now.

And, I happen to look about to see, everyone has moved away from

us, leaving us in the center, slowly moving together, all eyes on us.

El laughs her arms around my shoulders, "Everyone likes putting us at the center of attention" she jokes, as we sway together.

I nod to her statement, however, I move my arms and reach back to lace her hand between mine, El furrows her brow as I move us into a position I know by heart.

I begin to lead, "Mike, what are you doing?" she asks with a suspicious eye. I chuckle lightly, "My mom forced my older sister and I into dance lessons for years, I might as well put them to good use" I state.

El shakes her head in amusement, but she follows along with my movements, allowing me to move her however I like, and her eyes light up in excitement as we move perfectly to the music.

As the song begins to come to an end, El pulls me back closer to her, "You still surprise me" she sighs up to me, and I can't help but let out a light laugh and place a small kiss on her head, "I've got a lot more surprises to show you...later" I add, a small whisper into her ear.

As I pull back her eyes go wide, and her cheeks are fully red, but I can see her eyes darken slowly, knowing she is just as excited as I am.

I lift an eyebrow to her and she gives me a shy smile. She lifts herself up on her tiptoes and our lips meet in a sweet embrace as she links her arms around my shoulders, pulling us closer together.

I deepen the kiss and our crewmates cat-call and wolf-whistle at our display. Not afraid to show my affection we continue our display until I feel an unsettling presence behind us.

El pulls away from me slowly, and I follow her eyes as they look back behind me. I pull away from her a bit and Hopper stands close by as he raises an eyebrow at us.

I clear my throat, "Uh.." is all I am able to get out before Hopper places a hand on my shoulder and shows me a small smile. "Can I have a dance?" he looks over to El.

My shoulders relax slightly, and I return Hopper's smile, "Uh, yeah, of course" I shake myself out of my stupor as I take El's hand and place it into Hopper's.

El's eyes land on me, and I throw her a small wink and she mouths a "thank you" as I move off to the side, to watch Hopper and El share a dance together, as the musicians begin another slower and softer tune.

My heart warms as I follow their movements, and see that they are exchanging small words with one another. I can see El wiping at her eyes slightly as she pulls herself closer to Hopper and resting her small head on his large chest.

El's Point of View

I'm enjoying the closeness that Mike and I share in this moment. It's as if everything aligned just perfectly for this dance. My head rest gently against Mike's chest, and I can feel the steady quickness that his heart beats. I sigh at my contentedness. But, I pull away slightly to give him a soft smile.

"You still surprise me" I remark in honesty as I gaze up to him. He gives me a small chuckle before he throws in "I've got a lot more surprises to show you...later", his voice is husky and low as he whispers the last word into my ear.

I can feel my cheeks ignite at the meaning behind his words, but I know I want it too, and I feel my eyes darken in anticipation.

I lean forward on my tiptoes and connect Mike's lips with mine, and it quickly turns into a passionate exchange as cheers and whistles from our crewmates echo around us.

Silently wishing this moment never ends, I feel a presence approach us, and I break away from Mike slightly, and my eyes fall on Hopper, who stands tall behind Mike.

I laugh lightly at Mike's awkwardness to the situation, but Hopper places a gentle hand on his shoulder, showing him that everything is

okay, he is then asking Mike if he and I can dance.

Mike nods lightly as he takes my hand and leads it into Hopper's, leaving us to our own dance.

I'm just able to turn to Mike who is watching us with a soft look, and I mouth a "thank you" to him, in which he casts me a quick wink.

I bring my attention back to Hopper, who is holding me just as Mike had before. One of his large steady hands holds onto my hip with a light touch, my left arm rests gently on his shoulder, and our other two hands are grasped together.

I look up to the large man and give him a wide smile, he looks down to me, and returns the gesture. We sway gently to the music.

"Is it everything you wanted?" he asks me quietly as we move in a slow circle. I turn my attention to him and nod slowly, "It was perfect" I state in simple happiness.

"Good" he says in his gruff, deep voice. We are silent again as the music swells around us.

Hopper clears his throat, "Uh, um, El?" he asks, hesitance written in his voice. "Yes?" my eyes look up to him, but he is turned away slightly.

He lets out a long sigh, "You know...you know you're special to me right?" his words fall between us, as I furrow my eyebrows slightly.

I shrug my shoulders, "Of course Hopper" I answer him honestly, "You're special to me too".

He clears his throat again, "Ugh, I mean..." he falls short, the words dying against his lips. I stay silent, waiting for him to find the right words, "I just....don't want to see you get hurt" he shakes his head.

My shoulders relax slightly as I decipher what he tries to relay to me, I squeeze his hand tighter, in which makes him cast his glance down to me, "You know" I say in a light sing song way, "You've been more of a father to me, than my own" I admit to the Captain, as his eyes go wide at my words.

He doesn't speak, and I feel my heart speed up slightly, hoping I didn't read his words incorrectly. However, my thoughts on being rejected are quickly dismissed as I watch a tear trickle out of his eye.

I feel tears start to prick at mine as well. Hopper sputters, "You've....you've been like a daughter too" he admits, his voice deep with emotion.

I chuckle lightly as I pull myself into him and rest my head against his chest, and he pulls me close. That overwhelming feeling of completeness finally washes over me, as if my true family has finally come together.

The day seems to go by in a blur as it is filled with laughter, singing and dancing. Mike and I exchange dances with each other and other crew members until we can no longer feel our feet. And we fill our stomachs with delicious foods as we mingle among our crew members.

The sun begins to lower itself into the horizon, and my eyes follow it, mesmerized by its journey.

I'm pulled out of my thoughts when I feel a familiar hand on my lower back. I turn to meet Mike's dark eyes and smiling face.

He brings his lips closer to my ear, "Come on", he whispers, so seductively it sends a shiver down my spine.

He pulls away and gives me a new look, and I return a surprised one, "What?" I ask him, unsure as to what is behind his words.

Mike gets closer to me, "Come on, that surprise is waiting for you" he teases. He raises his eyebrows to me as he links my hand with his and he pulls me away.

I give him a curious look, "But, what about..." I start, but Mike shakes his head, "Don't worry it's all covered" he smiles mischeavously at me, as I've been following him towards the gangplank.

I cast a look over my shoulder and examine the party that is still in full swing, albeit that the crew members are a lot more drunk than

earlier.

"El" Mike's playful voice pulls me back to him, he has a knowing look in his eyes, "Trust me", is all he says, and it's all he needs to as we entangle our fingers together.

Smiles plastered onto our faces as we race down the gangplank, our heads held back in laughter as we disappear into the streets.

Our hands are tightly woven together as we race through the streets of the small town. Our footsteps fall together on the dusty road that guides us, leaving a cloud of dust behind us.

Both of our breaths come in and out quickly as we run. I can't help but let out a throaty laugh, thinking that we more so look like two little kids who have just gotten into trouble and not the husband and wife who just got married.

We are running up a hill that is oh too familiar. I can't help but allow the smirk to grow onto my face as Mike and I finally halt our speedy gait and come to a very slow walking pace as we approach the hill.

I turn to Mike and watch his reddened face with determination as we walk up the hillside. I know he feels my eyes on me, so he turns his face and raises his eyebrows at me, "What?" he asks with a knowing smirk as he bounces his shoulder against mine.

I roll my eyes slightly, "I know...where we're...going" I attempt to catch my breath and point to the tree at the top of the hill.

Mike follows my outstretched hand, and a wide smile now plasters his face. He turns back to me, "Oh...really?" he breathes back attempting to catch his breath as well.

Our hands are still holding onto the others fiercely, and I pull him closer, "You can stop...playing" I say between breaths, finally getting it back from our determined run.

Mike only shrugs his shoulders and says, "Okay" in an unceremonious way.

We continue to march up the hill, following the path that leads to it, when suddenly Mike is pulling me in the opposite direction, as we begin to veer off into the tropical forest.

I squeal lightly at the sudden change of events, "Mike, where are we going?" I ask being pulled along.

Mike lets out a long laugh as he continues to trudge along, "El, seriously, you don't know where we're going?" he gives me an incredulous look.

I furrow my brows, truly trying to figure out where we are going. The sun has finally begun to set in the forest, and the orange light cuts down through the breaks of the leaves that surround us.

I turn my head in every direction, trying to determine where we are going, when, it dawns on me, and I want to smack myself in the head for my stupidity.

Instead, I let out a gasp of realization and Mike twists his head back to meet my eyes, and I can see he is smiling with glee. We both don't say anything, holding onto the anticipation.

When I begin to recognize our surroundings, Mike stops suddenly and I crash into him, "Ow, Mike!" I start as I rub my nose that ungraciously crashed into his back.

Mike gives me a look as he places his hands on my shoulder, "Sorry El, but I need you to turn around and wait here for a bit" his eyes look over me, waiting for a reaction.

I give him a confused look, "Why?" I ask him in serious interest. He lets out a little sigh but gives me a determined stare.

"You've got to trust me" is all he says, and I can't help but marvel at his tenacity and sigh in defeat, "Okay" I say low, but he gives me a large smirk and a quick kiss in return.

"Okay, I won't be long, but you've got to turn around" he begins to twist my body around. "Mike!" I whine to the boy, but he only chuckles. "I promise, I won't be long" he urges, as I plop myself onto the ground and huff in defeat.

I hear the rustling of leaves behind me as he heads off. I listen to the sounds behind me, and it sounds like he is snapping twigs and branches and moving frantically about.

It's been about fifteen minutes now and my patience is waning. I let out a long sigh, and I'm about to turn around to say something when I finally notice that Mike is heading back to me.

"Alright, it's all set!" his voice is filled with excitement as he steps in front of me with an arm outstretched.

I reach for his arm and let him pull me to my feet, "Finally!" I exasperated, in which I watch in amusement as Mike rolls his eyes.

I start to circle around, and just as I look up, Mike's hands cover my eyes, "Hey!" I yell to him as I fight to free his hands from my eyes.

Mike laughs, "Don't worry El, I'll guide you, I want it to be a surprise" he whispers into my ear. And I can hear the excitement in his voice, so I falter and let my hands fall from his, "Okay, show me the way" I state as I reach my hands out to not fall on something.

"Step forward" Mike directs and we begin to move together. We stumble a bit here and there, but Mike has a steady hold on me.

When he finally says, "Stop!" and I do so as quickly as possible, the anticipation begins to build within me.

I feel Mike's breath next to my ear, "I promised you that this is where we would spend our wedding night, so I wanted to make sure it was perfect" he whispers into my ear as he pulls his hands away.

It takes me a moment to take everything in, but as my eyes adjust, I feel my mouth fall open in awe.

My eyes move around our little oasis slowly. There is a wide fire nestled between large stones that crackles and pops as it dances away, a small pile of wood sits next to it.

Around the ledges and rocks sit numerous candles that are gently flickering in the still setting light.

The small waterfall cascades quietly into the small body of water. My eyes turn to the side, where a lean to, made up of a variety of trees, twigs and leaves. And underneath the structure lays a variety of soft looking blankets.

My heart begins to beat wildly in my chest as I take in the ambiance of the setting, and I my eyes prickle with tears.

"What do you think?" Mike's voice breaks slightly, unsure of my reaction. However, I let the awaiting smile spread across my face as my eyes meet his. A stray tear escapes, "It's perfect" I say quietly, and Mike lets out a breath and nods in relief.

I let myself move about our small oasis, my head turning this way and that, attempting to memorize every aspect and feature so that it stays ingrained in my head forever, "How did you do all of this?" I finally ask.

Mike blushes and shrugs lightly, "When you, Max and Will were out, I had Dustin and Lucas help me here".

I giggle slightly, "I'm sure they didn't stop harassing you the whole time?" I give him a knowing look, in which Mike lets out a frustrating breath, "Like you wouldn't believe" he admits.

I'm still taking in everything when I feel knowing arms wrap around my waist in a loving gesture. I sink back into his hold and melt with him.

He brings his head next to mine, "You really like it?" he asks. I chuckle, and twist my body around so that we are face to face, I bring my arms up and around his neck, my hands play with his curly black hair lazily, I give him a small laugh, "You couldn't have done a better job" I say to him as my eyes search his face.

He gives me a warm smile in return, and I watch, mesmerized as his eyes flutter between my eyes and lips. His eyes begin to darken slightly, and I can't help but move towards him, both of our wants and desires at the same level.

We both close our eyes as lips finally meet in a sweet kiss. I tangle

my fingers through his locks, as Mike pulls me closer against him.

The heat between us sparks, as I feel his tongue begin to nudge at my lips, and I accept him eagerly. And as if a match is set off between us, we start our journey into a heated session.

Our mouths open and close in a frenzied motion, each one of us trying to outdo the other. I let out a soft moan as Mike bites down on my lower lip, I hear him sigh in pure bliss. We both battle for domination, as our hands begin to roam.

I can feel the heat building and curling within my stomach, our need to be closer together grows frantically between us.

Mike grabs onto my butt, and squeezes tightly, and then he slowly, tantalizingly brings it down the back of my thigh. I shiver into his touch. "You looked so beautiful in your dress today" Mike breathes between our kisses.

"I knew you would love it" I say between our breaks. I move my hands slightly and tug at his tucked in shirt to relieve it from its restraint. I pull away slightly to give Mike a heated look, "You didn't look too bad yourself either" I say as seductively as possible, and Mike groans into my arms, but I keep him at bay as I slowly unbutton his white shirt.

Mike, however, continues his onslaught of kisses as he presses his lips against the sensitive spot of my neck, and my mouth opens and I moan slightly at the amazing feeling.

I finally free him of his last button and he pulls at the fabric and tosses it aside. He brings his hands up and cups my cheeks gently. He brings his mouth down onto mine in a searing kiss that nearly knocks me off my feet.

He pulls away with a grin plastered to his face, "Let's go swimming" he wiggles his eyebrows at me, and I can't help but let out a laugh, I pull away slightly, and turn just right so my back is facing him, "I'll need help out of my dress than" I say in a low voice, and I'm sure Mike dies right there.

Instead of approaching me quickly, he does so in a steady pace, as he reaches gently behind me to undo the ties.

I feel his hands work delicately at the ties and buttons that hold me into the dress. When he is done the first section, he pulls away the fabric and presses a cool kiss against my warm skin. I tremble beneath him.

He keeps his head close to me as he works, with skilled fingers at the second group of ties and buttons, as he continues to plant kisses down my tanned skin. I mentally curse myself for picking out a dress with so many ties and buttons.

When he is finally done with the last section, I let out a sigh, and he chuckles at my impatience. He gradually moves up my back, his hands dancing across my skin. When he stands to full height, he gently turns me so that we are facing each other.

His eyes are heated with desire, and it takes my whole willpower to not jump on him right then and there.

He raises his arms and places them on the straps of my dress, and he gently moves them down my arm. His eyes don't leave mine as he guides my dress from my skin. As the straps move, my chest becomes more bare to him, and when they are in sight, he finally looks down, and a look of hunger overtakes him.

Mike, however, holds himself back as he navigates the dress downwards as it slips over my stomach, and finally over my midsection. He takes in a tight breath as his eyes widen, at finally noticing, I was completely bare beneath my dress. I'm pretty sure he is drooling.

"El" he growls as he takes me in, and within moments his mouth is on my breast, and I gasp in shock. I throw my head back as he administers them slowly, delicately, and I moan in satisfaction as I dig my hands into his hair.

He continues his administrations, but the desire in my stomach continues to burn fiercely. I pull him away from my breast and he sighs in disappointment, I chuckle at him and place a light kiss on his

pouting lips, "What happened to swimming?" I tease.

And he chuckles at me, "Oh yeah, I got distracted" he says lowly as he pulls me flush against him.

I don't let him get into it much as my hands travel down to his pants, my fingers dip down against his beltline, teasing him. He thrusts his hips towards me. I grasp onto his belt and unbuckle it, our eyes holding each others gazes.

It jingles open and I unbutton his pants and zip down his fly, I dance my fingers just above his pelvis and quirk an eyebrow up at him. Mike opens his mouth to speak, but as fast as lightning shove my hands into his pants and grab onto his full erection and squeeze tightly. He growls and moans into me.

I move my hands in a steady rhythm, as Mike pulls me closer to him, his lips find my neck as he tugs and pulls at my skin.

Mike finally pulls away, "I thought we were swimming" he chuckles, although strained. I laugh with him, "Sorry, got distracted" I throw a wink at him as I let go of his member, and lace my fingers through his belt loops and pull them down in one fluid motion.

We stand there for a moment, marveling at one another. The last time we had been *this* exposed to one another, was right in this spot. Although they had taken their fair share of escapades on the ship, they were quick and heated moments, this was totally different. We finally had time to just admire one another, not afraid to be discovered.

Mike reaches his hands out to me, he nuzzles his face into mine, "You, El" he breathes, "Are the most beautiful woman to ever walk this earth, I don't know how I got so lucky" he meets my eyes with a brilliant smile on his face.

I hide my head into his neck and kiss him lightly, "You're too much Mr. Wheeler" I kiss him once more, and pull away, I take his hand and pull him towards the water, "Come on!" I giggle excitedly.

Third Person

Warning: Lemon ahead!

Mike and El head towards the water excitement filling their beings. El decides that she doesn't care what the water temperature is, so she pulls Mike quickly into the water. Both of them yelling in glee.

El dives under the water quickly and squeals in delight, Mike follows suit, breaking the surface of the water, her shakes his head like a dog, splashing El with water, "Hey!" she yells to the boy, who only chuckles as he swims towards her.

"Hmm" He gives her a once over, "I think I remember where we left off, last time" he says lowly, as he reaches out to pull El to him.

She giggles in delight, "Mike", she coos at him as she wraps her arms around him and her legs move to entwine themselves around his hips.

The water allows them to float around lightly, Mike not having to strain himself with El's weight. She burrows her head into his shoulder and hums in contentedness. She looks past his shoulders and admires the flickering candles that are scattered about like fallen stars on the rocks, she hugs Mike tighter to herself.

"It's so beautiful" she remarks in a soft whisper. Mike hums in agreement, "Yeah, but not as beautiful as you" he comments.

El pulls away chuckling, "You're so cheesy" she pushes his shoulders gently, and he holds her tighter against him.

They both float around in a lazy circle, their eyes searching each others faces, El breaks the silence, "What are you thinking about?" she asks him, Mike gives her a pointed look, "How much I want to kiss you" he admits without a second thought.

El raises an eyebrow but slowly moves closer to him, "Then why don't you?" she challenges him. And it's all he needs to bend his head slightly as he places a fierce kiss on her lips. The wetness from the water adds a seductiveness to their parting lips as they meld together.

El brings her hands up to cup Mike's face as they continue their flurry of kisses. Mike grips onto El's bottom tightly as he pulls their midsections together, grinding them together. They both moan at the contact, as they continue to float around in the water.

After their passionate exchange within the water, Mike pulls away slightly, as he brushes his nose against El's, they nuzzle one another as they move their hands about the others bodies.

Mike brushes his hand lazily up El's back, the coolness of the water lets goosebumps rise on her delicate skin at his touch. While El moves her hands up and down Mike's arms, squeezing his grown biceps.

El can feel Mike's gazing lingering on her, so she looks up slightly, casting him a look. "Do you want to get out?" he asks, a bit of anxiousness laced in his voice.

She gives him a small smile and nod, they disentangle from one another and move towards the shore.

Once they are on dry land, Mike grabs onto El's hand and guides her over to the lean to. He bends down and picks up one of the larger blankets and he casts it up and over El, and then around himself, he pulls them together, El chuckling at his motions.

Mike begins to rub at El's arms to dry her off, and she begins to do the same. Mike glances a look down at El, and he catches a mischievous look in her eyes. He's about to question her, when suddenly she throws part of the blanket over his head, and she rubs vigorously at his damp locks.

"El!" he cringes at her onslaught, until she finally pulls away, laughing. "Look at your hair, it's so curly!" she admires his even curlier wet hair.

He raises a hand to his head and sighs, "You've seen it wet before" he mutters, and she shakes her head, "Yes, but never, like this" she says softly, and their gazes meet once again.

Mike raises an eyebrow to her, and El takes his hand as she pulls them under the lean to. Now that they are mostly dry, El pushes

herself back towards the wall of the lean to, and Mike follows.

El lays down on her back, as Mike lays down on his side. She looks up at her now husband, and she can't help but sigh as the firelight behind him gives him an orange glow. She reaches up and brushes a gentle hand against his cheek, he bends into her touch, his eyes closing.

"You're so handsome" she remarks, in which he smiles down at her. He moves and places one of his hands on her hip, as gently as possible as he moves it slowly up her body, his eyes trace her up and down.

He scootches closer to her, his dark eyes find hers, "You're skin is so soft, I can't get over it" he chuckles. El moves her hand and places it on his chest, and she feels him stiffen at her touch, "And you're so strong" she squeezes lightly.

Mike moves so that he is right next to her, their bare skin touching at the hips, he gives her a blazing look, "I love you" he says just barely above a whisper. El sighs at his words, she places her hand behind his neck and pulls him down to her, "I love you too" she says back as they lean in closer together.

Their noses brush lightly against the other, and they slowly close the gap between them. As they kiss Mike anchors himself with either arm on the side of El. They move in sync with one another as their lips tangle together.

The moment is slow as they feel each other out. Their mouths allow the other entrance as they nip and pull at each other. They both feel the fire building and knotting within their stomachs.

Mike casts one of his legs over El, as she moves her arms and places them against his hips. He lowers himself gently against her, their bare skin meeting as one.

Mike turns his head and begins to kiss down El's neck, and she moans at his ministrations. "Mike" she coos up to him, as he leaves a mark on her neck. El presses firmly on his lower back as their midsections come together, the grind against the other, both sighing at the

pressure.

El wraps her legs around Mike's and she pulls him closer as he moves against her. Their eyes meet and then their mouths are placed against one another again, moving in sync.

Mike pulls away slightly, and he looks at her in a way that is only described as pure and utter love, in which she wholeheartedly returns.

"Are you ready?" he asks her, a small blush on his face, El reaches up and places both hands on the side of his face as she gives him a warm smile, "Yes", she answers simply, and he bends down to place a slow and passionate kiss on her awaiting lips.

He pulls away slightly and he arranges himself appropriately above El, he pushes his erection towards her entrance, they look at each other, and they can both feel the others apprehension, but El gives Mike a nod of okay, and he gently eases into her.

They both open their mouths in shock at the feeling of finally coming together, as Mike slowly progresses himself inside of her.

She winces slightly at the pain of her first time having Mike within her, he immediately catches this and stops, "Are you okay?" he asks a little too worriedly. El giggles a bit, "Yes, just need to adjust" she says through a breath.

Mike nods, as he continues his pursuit, and soon, he is fully inside her, and El gasps at his fullness inside of her. They stare up at each other briefly and sigh, Mike bends down and captures El's lips with his own, as he slowly starts to move.

El braces her arms on his back, as she feels his gradual movements inside of her. She hears Mike grunt, "El, this feeling" he breathes, as he pulls away from her mouth, "I know" she whispers, as she pulls him back, locking her mouth with his.

El shifts beneath him, as she casts one of her legs over his, and he continues to move in and out. Their breaths become rapid and more heated as Mike's pace picks up. El begins to thrust and move her hips

with Mike's, which makes them both moan into the others mouths.

They tangle together, a mess of clumsy limbs, but filled with love and compassion they only have for one another.

Mike pulls back again, as they lock eyes with one another, they give each other warm smiles, not needing words between them. He hovers over her, bracing an arm on either side of her head. "El, you feel amazing" he moans into his pleasure. El lets out a small laugh, "You feel so good too", she remarks, but throws her head back as Mike moves against a tender spot within her.

He moves back down and they kiss once again, as he thrusts in and out of her. He can feel himself reaching his point, and as El grips and grasps onto the skin of his back, he can tell she's close too, so he speeds up his motions.

"Mike!" El squeezes him tightly and he can feel her nails digging into his back, but he doesn't care because he lets out a long moan too, as they finally release together, their breathing becoming staggered.

Mike thrusts a couple more times, as they both breath in and out heavily, their faces close and hot breath on the other. Sweat slick against their skin. "Heh, wow...that was.." El tries through her breaths, and Mike only smiles in return as he finishes, "Amazing" he agrees as he pulls out of her and lays next to her side.

He throws an arm over El, and a blanket over both of them. Mike lays on his back, as El snuggles into his chest. He kisses the top of her head gently. "I don't think I'll ever get tired of that" he jokes. El laughs lightly, "Yeah, me either" she admits, as she holds him close.

"You're everything I could ever wanted El", Mike whispers to the girl next to him, and her brown eyes move across his face, "And you're everything and more" she says, moving to give him three quick kisses.

They rest against one another as they lay peacefully in their lean to, their limbs tangled together, as they rest in their moment of bliss.

Well, let's just say, that surprised me too! Never thought I'd be

able to write something like that, but I did, lol! Tried to keep it sweet and as innocent as possible. Not into the over the top stuff, just simple and sweet, and I hope you guys liked it as well! If you think it is too much, I can move this chapter to 'M' rating to be safe, and I hope no one is offended, it just happened and I hope you guys were okay with it!

Please let me know what you think! I kept it under 'T' Rating still because I've seen a lot more intense be in the 'T' section.

As always PLEASE REVIEW! Love to hear from you wonderful readers! Till the next chapter!

35. Embarassing Friends

Yeah, I know, you guys are probably hating me right now and I sincerely apologize for taking so incredibly long to get to this next chapter! I've been soooo busy trying to get everything set for my internship and it has been such a headache to get it set, but things are finally moving forward and getting to where I need them to be.

Anyways, I hope you are still all enjoying this story, it is slowly coming to the end, and I know I've said that like three times, but I am getting close to wrapping it up.

But, on with the story...

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of View:

The harsh morning light cascades over our small oasis as the warm breeze blows against my bare shoulders and I shiver slightly at the sensation. I groan slightly and nuzzle myself into the warmth that is beside me, and I sigh in contentment.

At my small movements, Mike moves in response, his arms moving to wrap more snugly around me as he buries his nose into my hair. He places a gentle kiss there, which causes my mouth to lift into a small grin.

He mutters a "Morning" to me as he begins to awake. I move against him and place a delicate kiss on his bare chest, "Good Morning" I return, sleep still heavy in my voice as well.

He turns every so slightly so that he can hold me tightly to his chest, and I sigh at the gesture. "How are you feeling?" he asks quietly.

I shrug against him, "I feel fine" I answer honestly.

Mike's chest reverberates with a small hum to my answer, as we continue to lay in peace, relishing in this moment together.

Mike eventually moves though and turns so that he is hovering over me slightly, he gives me a coy look as his shaggy black hair hangs down into my face, I smile up at him as I reach up a hand and run it along his smooth chest.

"What are you smirking about?" I ask him with a knowing smirk.

He chuckles lightly as he bends down and places a gentle kiss upon my mouth, pulling away after the briefest encounter, I whimper as he pulls away.

He continues to smirk down at me, as he lazily runs a hand up my bare side. "I just can't help but think of how lucky I am...and I can't get over how beautiful you are" he says.

I give him a soft look and can't help the blush that forms on my face. "You always say that" I duck my head slightly.

He bends down and places a couple teasing kisses against my skin, which causes me to tuck away from his ticklish onslaught.

"Mike, stop!" I try to effortlessly push him away, but him being so much larger, my effort is futile, not that I really want him to go away.

My cries fall on his deaf ears as he continues to pepper kisses up and down my skin, as he has now shifted to hover above me.

He eventually pulls away, my chest heaves up and down as I try to catch my breath. I open my eyes slightly, and they catch Mike's dark eyes, that seem much deeper now, and I can immediately tell, and feel, what's on his mind.

We stare at each other for a couple of moments, taking in the situation, and within seconds Mike lunges down to me, our mouths meeting in a furious kiss, our bodies tangling together, as we reenact last night's events over again.

We walk hand in hand as the afternoon sun stretches over head, the humidity starting to get just uncomfortable enough, where our backs begin to sweat, and our shirts stick to our backs.

However, for Mike and I, we find no care, because our hearts are full, and there's a lightness in both of our steps.

We keep throwing shy, knowing glances at one another as we make our way back to the ship. It's a bit later than Mike had explained he had agreed to Hopper that he would have us back, but, we honestly don't care.

My mind drifts back to our early morning endeavors that involved quite a few episodes of love making, getting cleaned off in our oasis, and maybe one more quick act of becoming one with another, before we knew we had to be returning to the ship.

Both Mike and I dragged out getting ready to ensure to etch this moment alone together, for we had no idea of when we would get a moment like this again.

We both dressed one another slowly, giving each other quick kisses, and soft touches, marveling at our moment together.

Mike gathered up the blankets, while I got the food picked up. We both turned to look at our oasis one more time, each releasing a long sigh, as we sadly walked away.

Once we were walking though, Mike's hand quickly entangled with mine, and held fast. At the action I whip my head towards him, and he gives a tremendous smile, which I can't help but return, my heart filling with an eternal happiness. I snuggle into his side the best I can as we walk along the dusty streets of Florida.

We are whispering sweet words to one another and rapture our moment of pure bliss when *The Hawk* comes into view.

Mike and I are still pressed as tightly as possible against one another as we walk up the gangplank. Mike presses a sweet kiss to my cheek as our feet land on the main deck, and a wide grin plasters itself against my face.

Mike opens his mouth to speak, when a loud, obnoxious voice breaks between us, "Well, well, well, looks like the newlyweds have *finally* returned from their little 'adventure'".

Both Mike and I roll our eyes and can't help the flushes that fill our faces. We turn to see Dustin, Max, Lucas and Will making their way towards us, each with wide, knowing grins on their faces.

Mike pulls me closer to him, knowing that we are about to get the mockery of a lifetime from our friends.

"Did you guys have a good time?" Lucas starts in from Dustin's previous dig, he wiggles his eyebrows.

"Yeah, you guys were gone for *quite* some time" Max draws out, shoving my shoulder lightly.

I roll my eyes once again, and I take in a deep breath, "Okay guys, we get it, *obviously*, we did, what you guys are insinuating. We're *married* now, so of course we're doing stuff that you guys just can't help but tease us about", the words tumble effortlessly from my mouth.

And at my statement I watch in amusement as each of our friends mouths fall open in shock at my blatant statement.

I give them a once over with a raised eyebrow, daring them to continue to mock us. '*They obviously know what we did, better to get it out in the open then feel the embarrassment of their teasing*' I reason with myself inside my head.

I feel Mike chuckle against me at my words, and obviously at the sight of our friends faces. Eventually, they break from their stupor and they shake their heads slightly.

Dustin lets out a long sigh, "You guys are no fun" he huffs.

We all chuckle at his statement as Max and Will reach out to take our supplies from us, "We'll take care of these for you guys, why don't you two and Dustin and Lucas get breakfast, I'm sure you guys are hungry" Max can't help but throw out a wink to the meaning behind her words, and I shake my head at her final tease.

But, instead of saying anything I nod my head and turn to Mike, who gives me a smile, "Yeah, I'm starving, let's go eat" he states, as he grabs my hand and we walk towards the mess hall.

"We'll catch up with you guys later!" Will calls over his shoulder while he and Max make their way across the deck.

"Where are they going?" I ask the other boys in front of us. They simply shrug their shoulders and cast curious glances towards them as well, my question looming unanswered in the air. I shrug it off and hungrily make it towards the mess hall.

Upon entering the mess hall, all eyes fall on Mike and I, as just about every crew member eagerly come to greet us upon our return.

"Ah, the newlyweds are back!" I hear Steve yell from his table as he makes his way towards us. And before we know it, Mike and I are swept away from each other as a mob of our crewmates surround us.

"El, you looked so beautiful yesterday!" Jonathan is the first to congratulate me with a hug, and the pattern continues of 'how beautiful I looked' and 'you're such a lucky girl!' are thrown around me.

For Mike, he's getting pats on the back and knowing winks and shoves and comments like, 'Ol' Mikey's a man now!', and quiet whispers of, 'how was it boy?' surround him.

Even though he's a bit away from me, I can still hear the comments and I can see his usually light face is lit up like he's on fire from the personal questions.

I can hear his stuttering comments as he desperately tries to avoid the more probing questions. And I can tell he is starting to get overwhelmed, so I break away from the sea of men surrounding me, and kindly direct myself away as I weave through the crowd towards my husband.

After a couple of 'excuse me's' and 'pardon me' I finally make it to Mike's side, I grab his very sweaty and intertwine it with mine. At the gesture he turns towards me, and a relieved smile plasters his face.

I raise my voice slightly, "Gentleman, friends, please, we can't thank you enough for all the love and kind words, but...we're very hungry" I

plead to them and I flutter my eyes at the men.

And at this, they men quickly melt, and they begin to unravel from us, as they let us through. Mike and I thank everyone as we move to grab our breakfast and we go to sit with an awaiting Dustin and Lucas at our usual table.

We sit down and we both let out long breaths. Mike shakes his head, "Wow, I never thought the other men could be like that" he says exhaustingly.

I smile as I bite into my morning oatmeal, "They're just trying to be sweet", I shrug.

Mike groans a bit, "At least they weren't asking you *really* embarrassing and personal questions about...last night" he whispers, his face going red once again.

I can't help but chuckle at my poor husband as Dustin and Lucas join in as well. "They're men Mike, they can't help but laugh" I admit.

He sighs again, "Yeah, hopefully it stops soon".

Once we have finished breakfast the four of us make our way back onto the main deck, in which is in full swing due to the fact that we are shipping off tomorrow with the tide.

So, every seaman is moving about the deck, fulfilling his duty and making sure the ship is all set to make sail.

We are heading to meet up with Jonathan, so that we can be given our tasks as well, when a large hand on my shoulder stops me in place.

I trip in my step at the sudden force and I turn quickly towards the source, and I let out a breath of relief to see that Hopper stands beside me.

"Hopper, hi!" I greet him cheerfully, he rolls his eyes slightly at my disconcert for formality. "El....Mike" he greets Mike with a slight hesitation.

"Sir" Mike says quietly, trying to not meet his eyes. Hopper turns his attention towards me, "El, we will be heading out tomorrow and will be setting our sights on Ireland to return Max to her home, as promised" he nods to me.

I'm taken aback slightly at his words, completely forgetting that Hopper had promised after the dreaded battle that we would be returning Max back to her home for helping us win the battle.

"Oh...right" I hesitate as his words sink in slightly. "After, we will be settling back into England, where, we will probably be docked for awhile since we have fulfilled our duties for the King, you'll get some time to see your family and such" he shrugs.

And at this statement I perk up a bit, a thought dawning on me, "I'll get to see Joyce" I whisper to myself.

"Hmm?" Hopper gives me a confused look, and I stutter slightly realising I must have said my thoughts aloud. "I...uh, was just thinking about seeing Will's mom again...actually...." I take a long pause. "We...don't know what happened to her...after we left" I say quietly looking down at the worn deck.

I feel Mike's hand tighten in mine, and I return the pressure back to him. I turn my head slightly to meet his gaze, he gives me a tight smile, not really sure what to do in this type of situation.

Hopper clears his throat to get my attention and I turn my look back to him, "I'm sure she's fine El, from the letters I received there have been no more attacks since the island was destroyed" he offers.

I shrug my shoulders, "Yes, but...it's been years since we've heard from Joyce, she didn't even know where we ended up....I can't even think what Will..." I stop short, not wanting to continue.

Hopper's hand finds its place on my shoulder again, I can feel my eyes watering, threatening to spill over. He lets out a heavy sigh, "Kid, we'll find her, you kids will have plenty of time to visit with your families, okay?"

He gives me a steady look, and I only nod in return. He gives me one

more pat on the shoulder and he heads off.

Mike tugs at my hand once he is gone, and I gently lift my face so that our eyes meet. His eyes are soft and full of questions, but he knows better than to ask right now. He gives me a tender smile, "Hey, don't worry, we'll all help you in finding Joyce, just like Hopper said" he tries to reassure me.

I only shrug my shoulders in return, my eyes are still full of sadness, when suddenly a bright look comes across Mike's face, "But, hey, you can...meet my family too" he says trying to not sound too eager.

I give him a questioning look, "Yeah, my parents, my two sisters, they'll be so excited that I actually met someone!" his face immediately flushes at his words and he ducks his head slightly.

At this I can't help but push a little, "What do you mean?" I ask him.

Mike lifts his shoulders and stutters a little, "Well....it's not like I'm some, stellar guy, El, for someone like me" he points to himself, "To end up with someone like you" and at this he twirls me slightly, which puts a smile on my face, "I don't think they were expecting that" he admits with a bashful look.

At this I give Mike an earnest look, I step towards him and place a gentle hand on his face, his dark eyes move to meet mine, "Mike", I say sternly so that he understands the meaning behind my next words, "Any, girl would have been lucky enough to have you. But, no other girl got that chance because I couldn't help but fall madly in love with you".

And at my words Mike's whole demeanor softens, "You are everything and more to me, I hope you know that" I give him a steady look.

He chuckles slightly as he reaches out to pull me towards him, he nuzzles my nose, which makes me smile like always, "Have I ever told you how lucky I am to have you?" he jokes.

And I shake my head at his words, "You might have mentioned it once" I tease him, as I bring his head down to mine and we share a sweet kiss.

He pulls away with that beautiful smile of his, "My mom is going to love you" he states as we begin to move across the deck once again, hand in hand.

"I can't wait to meet her, and your sisters too" I say, I can feel a bout of eagerness rising in my chest at meeting Mike's family.

He chuckles, "Yeah, they will love you, but I'm sure mom won't be happy she missed the wedding" he says sheepishly.

"We can always do it again for our families?" I suggest.

"That would be pretty great if we did" Mike answers honestly.

I snuggle up into his side and lay my head against his shoulder as we walk, "I'd marry you over and over again" I say happily.

At this Mike places a gentle kiss on my head, "I would too, as long as it's you" he finishes.

We smile and hold each other close as we finally find Jonathan and are given our duties.

Mike's Point of View

After a *very* long day of getting the ship ready to set sail, I drag myself down towards the sleeping quarters, very ready to hang up mine and El's hammock and get some much needed sleep.

Upon arrival, I can see Max and the rest of the boys hanging up their hammocks, they look just as exhausted as I feel. They see me enter and give me tired smiles.

"Where's El?" I can't help but ask the others. The guys shrug their shoulders but Max answers me, "She had to finish up helping the doctor with some sketches, she said she would be a little later" she shrugs.

I huff in disappointment but accept the fact as I go and grab our hammock. However, once I grab the material a voice from behind me says, "What are you doing?"

Unsure I heard the question correctly I turn to Max who's giving me a questioning look and her hands are placed firmly on her hips.

I shrug my shoulders quickly, "Uh...hanging our hammock?" I answer.

Max shakes her head as she rips the hammock out of my grasp. "Hey what...!" I start, but one look from Max's piercingly blue eyes tells me to shut my mouth.

"You and El are married now" she states.

I give her wide eyes, "Yeah and...?" I'm waiting for her to continue.

She lets out an annoyed sigh, like I'm supposed to know what she's talking about, "That means...you guys need to sleep together" she states as if it's the most obvious thing in the world.

I stare at her with the most obscene stare I can fix her, desperately trying to decipher her words and trying to figure out the hidden meaning.

"Max, we already do that" I answer, truly believing that I was being set up by the fiery redhead.

She lets out another annoyed sigh and shakes her head, "Yeah, but what are some *activities* most husband and wives do?" she strains.

At this my face grows hot, and my eyes widen. "Yeah, Mike, what activities do you and El get up to now?" the teasing voice from Dustin comes from the darkness.

I bury my face into my hands letting out a growl, "Ugh, you guys are impossible!"

Everyone is laughing at me now, "Oh, Mike, you're just too easy to tease!" Lucas chuckles.

I raise my head and glare at my so called 'friends'. "Seriously?! Do you guys think we would do...that...here?" I ask them.

They all laugh again at my uneasiness, and I roll my eyes. "Obviously not, but that doesn't mean it won't *ever* happen" Max approaches me

with a steady look.

I huff once again, but Max continues, she places an arm around my shoulder, "Look, we've got it all set up for you guys anyways" she says.

I give her another look, "What do you mean?" I ask, and just as Max is about to answer, we hear footsteps approach us from the stairs and a tired sigh is let out.

"Hey guys, what's up?" a tired El greets us, taking us all in, and observing that something else is going on, she turns a curious look to me.

"What's...going on?" she asks slowly.

I turn to Max, "Well, Max was just about to explain to us..." I urge her to continue.

Max pulls away from me and approaches El, "Perfect timing, now I can show you both together" she says excitedly.

"Show us what?" El asks, but Max doesn't answer as she pulls at El and the rest of us follow Max.

We are heading towards the front of the ship, where there are many nooks and hiding places that El and I have, well, *explored*, during our secret time together.

But, we've never been this far into the depths of the ship.

We are crawling through tight spaces that make it difficult to maneuver through, but it works fine.

When, Max steps through one last crossbeam and stands, she holds her hands out dramatically and says, "Ta-da!"

El and I clear the crossbeam and our eyebrows rise in surprise. We are met with a small corner of the ship that has a large about of blankets scattered about, I recognize some of the immediately as the ones we used last night.

"What's all this?" El turns to ask her female companion.

Max opens her mouth to speak but she is cut off by an eager Dustin, "It was my idea.." he starts when Will whacks his head behind him, "Ow!" Dustin cries, rubbing his head, "It was *our* idea" Will emphasizes, "That you guys kind of have your own space" Will shrugs.

Both El and I observe our friends, not really sure what to say. "Hopper knows too" Lucas offers in.

"He said this was okay?" I ask him with disbelief.

Lucas shrugs his shoulders and gives a coy smile "Well, we explained to him the situation", "Which he didn't like hearing about" Dustin throws in.

Lucas rolls his eyes at the interruption, "And he pretty much said, just do whatever, so we did".

"But why?" El asks, and I feel myself turn red at her question knowing that the guys were now going to get another chance to embarrass us.

Max walks up to El and places an arm over her shoulder, "Well...we know what married couples like to do, and we wanted no part of that" she jokes.

And at these words El's mouth drops open in shock, "Seriously guys?! We wouldn't do that!" she shakes her head.

I can't help but laugh, "I said the same thing" I shrugged my shoulders at her.

Max chuckles as well, "We've heard *some* things when you guys get carried away, we just thought this would be safer" she admits.

El lets out a long breath, "You guys are impossible" she shakes her head.

"Well, if it makes you feel better, Dustin and I can't share that hammock anymore, we kind of wanted yours" Lucas says.

El rolls her eyes, "So, you just wanted our hammock?" she asks in disbelief, in which Dustin and Lucas smirk to each other.

"Guys, it's really no problem, here, you get some privacy" Max looks at us while gesturing to the small 'bedroom'.

In the end I can't help but sigh, "Okay then, we'll accept it, and I guess Dustin can have our hammock" I say to them.

Dustin throws his fist up in the air, "Yes!" he says in triumph.

Max turns towards the boys and begins to push at them, "Come on guys, let's leave the lovebirds alone" she throws a wink in our direction, in which causes both of our faces to burn.

"Max!" El hisses at the girl, who only sticks her tongue back at the girl beside me as she and the boys disappear to head back towards their own hammocks.

Once we no longer hear our friends, I turn to El and she gives me a look. "Our friends are ridiculous" she shakes her head.

I laugh at her, but I can't help but step near her and pull her into a hug. She sighs at the contact. "Well, I can't say I'm *not* happy about this arrangement", I admit to the small girl in my arms.

She scoffs at me as she swats at my chest as she pushes away, but I hold her quick and pull her back into my arms, both laughing.

"Hey, you can't say you aren't a *little* happy about this situation, right?" I tease her, and she only buries her head deeper into my chest.

She sighs and turns her head upwards, "I guess" she admits sheepishly, her cheeks beginning to turn red once again.

I quirk an eyebrow up at her, and I can't help but lower my head to hers, our lips touch lightly, testing each other, before we smash them against one another.

Our lips move in rehearsed synchronicity against one another, a practiced art that we have just about mastered.

I move my hands so that they rest on El's hip, and I tentatively move my hands under her thin white shirt. I ease it up and over her head with steady practice. Our lips separate from one another, and I take in the sight of her.

She gives me a coy look, as she moves to do the same thing with my shirt. We move so that our bare chests press against each other, and I can't help but let out a groan at the feeling. I dip my head to recapture El's lips in mine.

Soon I pull her gently down onto our lovely bed of blankets, where we eagerly remove the rest of our clothing, and we once again become one with each other.

As the night moves on I can't help but think, *'I'm kind of glad our friends are the biggest pains'*, as I drift off to sleep, my beautiful wife laying between my arms.

Okay, got that chapter done! I know it's shorter, but I HAD to get something put out before someone said I abandoned the story, which I have NOT, just SOOOO busy!

I hope you enjoyed this chapter! And please let me know by, as always, leaving a review! I didn't get a lot from the last chapter, but I know that happens.

So PLEASE REVIEW! You are all awesome!

36. Girl Talk

You guys truly are awesome in every way, and I'm so glad you are all still enjoying this story! I'm really trying to write as much as possible, but also trying to enjoy others stories on here as well. I think this is the time where just about everyone has hit that wall of where we are DYING for the next season to come out and get some new content to play with! It's crazy to think that it's almost been a year since season 2 came out! And next summer can't come soon enough, hoping they at least release a trailer soon!

Anyways, on with the story...

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of View:

The weeks seemed to pass quickly as we traveled across the Atlantic ocean making our way up towards Ireland, our first stop.

It was definitely interesting to be sailing along with not much to worry about now that the war was over, and there was no threats looming over us.

So, the atmosphere of the ship returned to the normalcy we knew before everything started. We were all able to go back to our daily chores and we were able to be 'normal' sailors once again.

It was a feeling I secretly reveled in. Being out on deck, talking with the crewmembers about everyday things. And our brotherhood was closer than ever. However, as Max brought up the last time we sat about in our old hangout that, *'we need to change it to something else, El and I are girls'* she stressed.

Surprisingly, the boys didn't actually argue for once, and it was a quick agreement that we were the brothers *and* sisters of the H.M.S *Hawk*. We all drew blood once again within our palms, adding Max's to the mix, as we linked hands in celebrating our new group.

What was even more so satisfying was not having to worry about my earlier deception. No more did I have to wear my tight undershirts, but instead numerous right fitting tops that Max and I had both purchased before we had left Florida. We both felt more at ease as we moved about the ship, each of the seaman accepting us for who we were and expecting no less from us either.

Mike and my relationship seemed to blossom quite a bit too, following our marriage. Even though we were at first embarrassed by our friends push to keep us hidden away in our own little alcove on the ship, we actually found it to be rather enjoyable.

Many of the other men on the ship tended to give Mike the stink eye after finding out about our 'home'. Knowing that more than sleeping was probably going on there, and I can't say that their thinking wouldn't be wrong.

I smile slightly at that thought as I continue to work in one of Mr. Clark's books, as I paint in another one of his new specimens he has fondled over. Even though I am relieved to not have to worry about sea monsters and my deception, I sigh as I methodically paint the specimen on the wrinkled page. Finding, that, the tediousness of the job has dulled it slightly.

In the back of my mind I wish to be out on deck with the others, doing some kind of more demanding task. Or maybe talking a bit with Max, since it seems as if this trip might be our last bit of time together. This thought saddens me, so I shake it from my head, going back to other tasks I'd rather be doing.

I think back to Mike's and mine's cozy little 'home' and what we might get up to. My thought begins to wonder a bit, a small smile creeping up my face. But, before my thoughts go any deeper, a voice startles me, "Ms. Bre-, I mean *Mrs.* Wheeler, are you about done?"

I startle at Mr. Clark's voice, and my face flushes red from him startling me out of my more *intimate* thoughts with Mike. I turn fully back to the page I've been working on for hours and go back to putting the finishing touches on the plant.

"Yes, Mr. Clark, I'm just finishing up now" I sigh to him. I hear him

approach me and I can feel his eyes from over my shoulder, assessing my work.

Even though I can feel his eyes moving between my work and the specimen itself, I continue to put the finishing highlights in just around the bottom of the leaf. I pull my hand away from the painting to give it a final once over, and I nod in approval.

Mr. Clark places his hand on my shoulder and I move to see his face, which is smiling brightly. "My, Mrs. Wheeler, your talents have grown!" he praises as his eyes continue to move over my piece.

I sigh inwardly at his words, believing earlier that this piece definitely wasn't one of my bests, especially since I haven't had much time to work on my painting skills.

I give Mr. Clark a nod of approval, "I'm glad you like it", I say as Mr. Clark moves away from me as I stand and stretch for a moment.

"Yes, beautiful colors, shadows and highlights as always, you can be done for today" he gives me a curt nod as he goes back to his own desk in the corner, where numerous other specimens sit either dried in jars or floating in a foul smelling solution.

My body sighs for me at his words, being hunched over for hours, straining my eyes is not exactly 'fun'.

I move to leave the small 'office' that is Mr. Clark's workspace, I turn my body slightly casting a slight wave over my shoulder as I go, "Bye Mr. Clark!". "Good-bye, Eleanor" he says back and I cringe slightly at him using my full name, he being the only one now to *ever* use it.

Moments later I arrive to the top deck, and I take in a welcome breath of fresh air. "So, she finally emerges from the depths!" a familiar voice calls out.

My head turns towards the voice and smile when I see the fiery red hair of my only female companion on board. Max is sitting on an old barrel hunched over a fine pile of coiled rope.

Something she seemed to have picked up quickly on was the art of tying particular knots into ropes, so, she spent much of her time tying

and retying new and old knots on various lines throughout the ship.

I walk over to her and sit down on the deck, casting my legs forwards and my hands behind me, "What's going on?" I ask her as she continues to weave the rope between her nimble fingers.

She shrugs, not offering any word. My brows furrow in concern. This was not like Max.

"Are...you okay?" I question the girl. My eyes are trained on her face. Her piercing blue eyes don't move from the rope, but one hand moves to place a stray hair behind her ear. Her mouth tugs into a fake smile as she shakes her head, "Yeah, everything's fine, why wouldn't it be?" she says in a very non convincing voice.

I huff in response, "Okay, this isn't like you, there's definitely something bothering you Max".

She continues to sit in silence. And I let her for a couple minutes, until it's too much for me to bear, I let out a long frustrated sigh, "Come on Max, you know you can-" I try but before I can finish my sentence, her fingers stop mid knot, and she whips her head to face me, our eyes meet.

"I said I'm *fine* now please drop it!" she seethes at me. Her eyes search mine for a moment, seeing if I will retaliate or not, but instead I sit in silence, honestly stunned by her reaction. She's never snapped at me before.

Her hands begin to weave its familiar pattern into the rope once more, she sniffs. Still stunned, I sit and take in Max's appearance. For, even though her outburst startled me slightly, there was something else written deep within her eyes:sadness.

I don't push her. Knowing she's reached her limit. But, I continue to sit with the girl in silence, watching her work.

When it seems as if Max doesn't want to say anything else, I sigh once again, moving to stand, however, Max's hands stop moving once I'm on my feet.

I eye her suspiciously, waiting for her to make the next move. Her

flaming hair moves gently in the wind, as her eyes cast downwards, a deep sadness rooting itself on her face.

I move to get closer to her, I tentatively place a gentle hand on her shoulder. She doesn't flinch away, which I take as a good thing.

She opens her mouth as if she wants to speak, but no words come out. She closes her eyes and huffs in frustration, she lets out a growl, "I'm just sad...okay". I barely make out her whispered words, but my heart breaks when I hear them.

"Max" I say gently, giving her shoulder a light squeeze. And at this gesture I can tell it breaks her, she lets out a quick sob and moves her hair so that it covers her face.

A strong and determined girl like Max doesn't cry easily, and she doesn't like to show it either. I move so that I stand in front of her, I gingerly lift my hand and move her cascading hair out of the way of her face.

I'm met with watery blue eyes, my face softens. "Will you talk with me?" I ask her gently.

She closes her eyes tightly and a few tears break loose. I lift my hand to wipe them from her freckled face. I smile slightly as they remind me of Mike's, however, Max's are much more pronounced on her even fairer skin.

"I...I just don't know what's going to happen, and...I'm scared" her lips tremble as she speaks.

"What are you scared of?" I ask her.

She snuffles and shakes her head, "It's been years since I've seen my family...I'm afraid they won't remember me" she cries slightly.

"And, I'm going to have to leave the ship as well, which means I'm probably never going to see you, Mike, Lucas, Will or even...." she stops short and fresh tears pool from her eyes.

My heart gives at her words, knowing the last unspoken person holds a dear place in her heart. "Oh, Max" I attempt to comfort her, and as I

do so, Max moves towards me and wraps her arms around my shoulders tightly, as she burrows her head into my shoulder. Her cries now coming freely.

"I don't want to leave any of you!" she confesses, and now I can feel my eyes watering at her words and I hold her tightly.

"You won't lose any of us" I say quietly as I move my arms up and down her back, attempting to soothe the poor girl.

"You will *always* be apart of us, and this ship, you won't ever lose that" I explain to Max as she begins to settle down.

She pulls away slightly, her eyes now red and her nose dripping. I give her a soft look as I take an old napkin from my sleeve and wipe at her nose. She chuckles at the gesture.

"What?" I chuckle at her. She shakes her head, "Nothing, just, you're going to make a great mom someday" she says genuinely.

And these words freeze me in my tracks as my eyes go wide. Max notices and gives me a look, "What's wrong?" she laughs.

I shake my head from my thoughts and give her a smile "Nothing, don't worry about it".

She gives me a curious look, but finally shrugs her shoulders. I pat her knee slightly, "I know you're worried about Dustin too" I finally bring it to her attention.

Max whips her head at me, her eyes wide, and I give her a knowing smile. "Max, Dustin really cares about you, and obviously you feel the same, I think you two need to discuss some stuff before we make land soon".

I watch as she contemplates my words, her shoulders shrug. "He's tried to, I...just haven't let him" she admits with a sheepish look.

I scoff at her, "Max! You can't do that, especially if he wants to talk to you about it!"

Max hides her face, "I know, I just...thought if we didn't talk about it

then...we wouldn't have to", she shrugs.

I roll my eyes at her, "You know that's not how it works".

She gives me a tight lipped smile, "I know" she whispers.

I pat her hands, "You should find him, talk to him, you'll figure it out" I say as I stand, her eyes follow me.

Max gives a slight nod, "I will" she says quietly. "Good" I say quickly, as I stand, my eyes falling on a figure approaching us.

"Because, it seems your own lover boy has the same idea" I state.

Max's head flies upwards as she follows my gaze and her mouth drops open in shock as she Dustin approaching us.

Max stands quickly, I can see the panic rising within her, so I reach out and grab her before she makes a rash decision. I pull her towards me, "You *need* to talk to him, now's the time!" I hiss into her ear, as I try to stable her.

She lets out a strangled moan. But, before she can do anything else, Dustin reaches us, "Hey, girls" he greets.

"Hi, Dustin" I give him a warm smile, and Max doesn't say anything, her head pointed downwards. I sigh and push her shoulders hard. She stumbles slightly and her gaze meets Dustin's, "Hey" she says quietly.

Dustin shuffles awkwardly in his place. "So, uh, are you girls busy, or...?" Dustin asks us.

I shake my head 'no' and next to me Max nods her head 'yes'. Dustin gives us both a confused look. I huff and roll my eyes in annoyance, until a thought strikes me.

I move to Max, "Actually, we were just talking about you" I pull my mouth into a tight grin.

Dustin looks up surprised, "Really?" he asks. And I'm pretty sure Max is shooting daggers into me right now with her eyes. Which is proven correct as I turn to look at her, Max's piercing blue eyes are lined

straight as an arrow at me.

I gingerly place a hand around her shoulder, her eyes don't leave me. I push her towards the curly haired boy, "Yes, she was just saying how much she *needed* to talk to you".

Max attempts to put the brakes on me moving her body, but I relent in pushing her right up close to Dustin.

I take a fleeting glance at Dustin who seems somewhat relieved at my proclamation, and his body softens as he takes Max in.

He lets out a long sigh, "Do, you want to go somewhere to talk?" He asks with a bit more courage than before.

Max is still stiff in my arms, she is now avoiding mine and Dustin's waiting eyes. She turns her head downwards, her red hair cascading down, shielding her face from our view.

She doesn't speak, and I can see Dustin is becoming more nervous now. I give Max a little shake and get close to her ear, "Max!" I whisper, "You've got to talk to him, just get it done now" I hiss into her ear.

A moment later she finally softens in my grasp, and she turns her head upright. Her gaze meets Dustin's and she sighs, "Okay" she whispers, and moves closer to the boy.

He gives her a small smile, and they walk off together. I watch them for a bit, a frown forming on my face as my eyes follow them. I'm silently hoping to myself that everything works out okay.

I'm brought out of my thoughts when I hear a "Hey!" from behind me. I startle and turn to the very familiar voice.

My face softens as I see my husband approach me. "Hey" I say quietly as we greet each other with a short hug and quick peck on the lips.

I must still be frowning because a look of worry crosses over Mike's face. "What's wrong?" he asks, looking me over.

I give a slight shrug, my eyes turning back to where I had recently

been watching Max and Dustin walk off. "It's Max and Dustin" I sigh, turning back to Mike.

He shrugs his shoulders, "What's going on?"

I pull my lips into a thin line, "Max is worried about what will happen between her and Dustin once they get to Ireland" I explain.

Mike takes in my words and nods his head, "He'll probably stay with her, won't he?"

I turn to Mike and it's my turn to give him a questioning look, "You answered that like it's without a doubt".

Mike shrugs again, "You're not around us guys enough to hear some things we *actually* talk about when you and Max aren't around".

I frown at him, "What do you mean?" I ask, my interested perked.

He chuckles, "Well, guys don't usually talk about 'guy' things around girls", he says as if it's the most obvious thing in the world.

My eyes widen, "What's so important that you boys talk about when we aren't around?" a teasing tone finds its way into my words.

And at this Mike begins to shuffle about slightly, obviously nervous about his next words. "It's nothing" he comments simply.

I roll my eyes at him, and push at his chest, "Obviously it's *something* because you don't want Max and I to hear it".

I continue to look at him, waiting for him to give in. He continues to twitch uncomfortably in his spot, unsuccessfully trying to avoid my gaze.

He opens his mouth to speak, but only small noises make their way out, I can't help but laugh at his state.

"Really, it's that difficult?" I push at him. He finally stops his fidgeting and lets out a long breath, "It's...it's just...guy stuff" he stutters.

Finally, I let out a string of laughter, "You just said that!" I say

incredulously.

"Boys, you're so stupid sometimes" I shake my head at my poor husband. He lets out a frustrated breath, "What, aren't there things that you and Max talk about when us guys aren't around?" he throws at me.

At this I stop and ponder his words for a moment, but I shrug, "I just told you what Max and I were talking about" I throw at him.

His eyes narrow, knowing that I've got him slightly caught. "You're impossible" he rolls his eyes. And I bring myself closer to him, bringing him into a hug, "I know" I say against his chest, as his arms finally wrap themselves around my back.

"I just know Dustin really cares about Max, okay?" he whispers out. I move my head so that my chin tilts up towards Mike, to show that I'm listening.

"He's always talking about her, and how much he cares, he's even..." he stops short. I give him a thin stare, "He's even *what...*?" I push Mike to continue.

Mike breathes out, he turns his head downwards so that our dark gazes meet, "He's even talked about proposing to her" he says as quietly as possible.

At Mike's words, my breath catches in my throat, I open my mouth to speak but nothing comes out. Mike gives me a sad smile, "He's afraid too" he admits to me.

I sigh into Mike's chest and pull him closer towards me. "I just hope everything works out the way it's supposed to" I admit.

Mike hugs me closer, "I do too, El, and I'm sure..." but his words are cut short by a long whistle warbling out across the deck, with a loud bellow from someone up top, "LAND HO!".

Mike and I break apart from our hug, our eyes quickly searching the horizon. And...there! Straight ahead, there is a small smidge of what looks like a small island, my heart sinks a bit, knowing that this is our next destination. We have arrived to Ireland ahead of schedule.

I'm awful, I know! I'm just so busy it's not even funny! Between juggling a job, internship and family I've had almost no time to type! Not just that but I've got another story buzzing around in my head that I will be writing after this one and I'm really excited about it!

But, I HAVE to get this one done first before I even think about a next one! Thank you all for sticking with me for as long as you have! And I hope I am not boring anyone either. I promise I'm getting to the end, I just need to put away a couple of things first.

And as always, PLEASE REVIEW! I live off of your wonderful comments! You are all great!

37. Ireland

Okay, not as long as a wait as the last one, and I'm sorry for the short chapter too, I just wanted to get SOMETHING out for you all! I hope all my lovely readers are still enjoying this story! I've gotten some really sweet reviews which are always appreciated and I adore reading them!

Anyway...on with the story...

Disclaimer: I do not own Bloody Jack or Stranger Things.

Third person:

The small smudge of land becomes more visible as *The Hawk* gracefully makes its way through the calm waters. Seaman are moving about the deck in a frantic, but knowing pace, making sure everything is how it needs to be in order to dock.

El makes sure she stands out of the way of the seaman, and she awaits off to the side of the ship, patiently waiting to receive some kind of demand. However, in the meantime her eyes switch between watching her husband and friends trim the sails, and casting her head over her shoulder as Ireland grows closer.

She sighs slightly, knowing that when they make landfall...many things will be changing. She shakes her mind from those thoughts, however, and puts her mind to where it needs to be, incase she gets called out.

But, the call never comes, and now her attention is fully fixated on the, not so small island, she believed they were approaching.

She allows her mouth to drop open slightly, as her eyes marvel at the beauty of the island she has never seen before. No, instead of the lush tropical forests filled with swaying palm trees and sandy beaches, her dark eyes marvel at the large roaming mountains, the pure white edges of the island gleam in the sunlight, as the dark blue waves crash angrily against them.

It's a bit cooler here, but El doesn't notice. Her eyes greedily raking over the rich green hills. "Wow" she breathes to herself as she can't help but take in the sight before her.

"Isn't beautiful?" a quiet voice approaches from behind El, she turns and smiles when she sees Max standing beside her. El silently remarks to herself how much Max's eyes resemble the blue water beneath them.

And in that moment, El catches Max do something she has never seen her do before. El watches in astonishment as Max's eyes water, and silent tears stream down her face. Without saying a word, El reaches over and places a delicate hand on the other girls shoulder. She turns to face El, and she gives her a small smile, in which El returns.

El doesn't push Max on what she and Dustin may have talked about, and instead, the two girls marvel at the island in front of them.

"EASY NOW!" a crackling voice calls down from one of the highest riggings, as the crew works together in a practiced dance as they move the correct ropes and sails in perfect sync.

They have finally made it to the port of Bantry Bay, as the crew of *The Hawk* gently steer the large boat into the dock. Men on shore are shouting out commands as well, helping the crew make their way onto the gangplank.

El stands off to the side, casting her head over the side, keeping a steady eye on the reef below. She and Max were told to keep a look out as they made port.

The ship finally comes to a bit of a harsh halt, as it scrapes lightly on the dirt below. El and Max stumble slightly at the impact.

"Get those ropes over!", "Make sure those knots are tight!" are the commands that pour over the crew of *The Hawk*, as they settle her into her resting place.

The crew seems to settle slightly, the most difficult part of docking the ship done with. El listens to the seaman on shore, and she smiles

at their accent.

She turns to Max, "Why don't you have an accent?" she asks slightly curious. Max gives her a curious look and blushes slightly, "It's been awhile since I've been home, the English accent has kind of settled on me".

El smirks at the girl, "Well, let's see if it comes back" she teases and the redhead shoves her lightly.

Teasing set aside, El becomes somewhat serious, "So...where *does* your family live anyways?" she asks.

Max frowns slightly at the question, "Not far from here, this was the port my father always used. My siblings and I used to race down here on the days we knew dad would be making port".

El nods at her answer. She opens her mouth to speak, however, she is interrupted by Hopper's presence.

"You ready kid?" his question is directed at Max. She looks at the large man with her steady blue eyes and merely nods.

Hopper tilts his head, "Alright, then, why don't you take your friends here with you, we'll be here for a couple weeks to resupply" he gives us steady looks.

"Don't go getting into trouble now" his gruff voice attempting to sound stern. El scoffs at him, "We'll be fine Hopper".

He rolls his eyes at the girl, "Just be safe is all, there'll be some seaman staying in the same town as well, so if you need anything, just ask for it".

Both El and Max nod at the Captain, and he turns from them. Soon after, Mike, Will, Lucas and Dustin join the girls. "You girls ready?" Lucas eyes move between the two of them.

They both smile and nod. "Let's get our stuff packed first, sounds like we'll be here for awhile" El states, and the group nods in agreement.

They all move down to their sleeping quarters, while El and Mike

move to their own space. El grabs her seabag and begins to tuck in some of her clothes, along with her shiv.

Mike moves and does the same. "Do you think we'll be able to stay together?" he asks after the silence stretches over them. El can't help but let out a small chuckle, and he turns to give her a questioning look, "What, can't not have *one* night of not making love?" she teases at the dark haired boy.

Mike's face blushes a thousand shades of red as he opens his mouth, however, his words seem to fail him slightly, "Wha- no! That's not...I..." he stumbles through his words, desperately trying to defend himself.

El only continues to laugh at his fumbling and approaches him. She reaches forward and wraps her arms around his neck, as she leans forward and silences him with a light kiss. She pulls away from him, his face more relaxed then before.

"Mike, I was only teasing" she gives him a brilliant smile. He softens in her grasp, "Sorry...you just kind of caught me of guard" he shrugs, her arms moving up as he does so.

El rolls her eyes at her husband, "Don't worry, I'm sure we'll figure out something" she pauses and then gives him a look. "Especially since...I've kind of *enjoyed* our nightly endeavors" she whispers into his ear hotly.

And at this El feels Mike's breath hitch in his throat as his arms tighten around her waist. He bends down to her ear and growls "El!!!..." into her ear.

She giggles even more as he begins to pepper her neck with needy kisses. El attempts to pull away, laughing as she does so, "Mike!" she giggles into him.

"Yor started it" he begins to pull and suck at her neck, and she finds herself falling into his embrace. She lets out a breathy moan, and in seconds Mike's lips find hers in a hot embrace. And within moments, their hands begin to roam the others bodies, pressing the other closer and closer.

"El" Mike groans again as they break away for a brief moment. She can feel herself growing more needy for her husband's touch.

Mike begins to snake his hands downwards, as they just barely graze the hem of her shirt. He begins to pull her back into their pile of blankets. She falls on top of him, his quick fingers pulling her shirt up, she moans into his mouth.

"Hey, you two better be getting ready and not sucking face in there, we need to get going!" Dustin's booming voice echoes into their 'room', in which pulls both Mike and El away from each other at lightning speed.

El sighs, "Yes, we're coming!" she yells back, laying her head on her husband's chest. Which is rising and falling in quick movements do to their heavy kissing.

El pulls her head up and smiles down at her handsome husband, she gives him a small smile, "We've got to go" she says in a disappointed voice.

Mike lets out a breath, "Ugh, I guess" he replies. Their eyes lock for a moment, and a special look crosses Mike's face. "What?" El asks him giving him a large grin. "You're just so beautiful" he sighs, and El giggles once again.

She pulls away slightly, adjusting her shirt, "To be continued?" she quirks an eyebrow at him. An even wider grin dances across his face, "Most definitely" he agrees as he stands to finish packing.

El and Mike meet the others out in their sleeping quarters. When their heads pop out from behind the small 'doorway' to their bedroom, all eyes are on them.

Will's and Max's eyebrows quirk up, while Dustin and Lucas shake their heads and laugh.

Mike gives them a questioning look, "What?" he asks. Dustin chuckles at him, "Did you guys get carried away in there or something? We've been waiting forever for you two" he states, raising his eyebrow.

El turns to Mike, and she can't help the small smile on her face, as she tries to avoid her friends accusing eyes. However, Mike isn't as subtle at hiding their *almost* little tryst, and his face lights up bright red, and he scrunches his face in disbelief.

"No, what are you guys talking about" he attempts to brush past him, but the boys can't help and let out long laughs. Mike throws them a glare.

"Sure, Mike, and your hair isn't usually twice as crazy as it usually is" Lucas points to Mike and then turns to El, "And it seems your wife here is sporting a new 'bruise' on her neck?"

El's eyes widen as she unconsciously slaps her right hand up to her neck, where, Mike had laid a very telltale mark upon her neck. She finally sighs in defeat, rolling her eyes, "Ugh, whatever guys, you can make fun of us all you want, we're ready to go now" she states as she moves pass her laughing friends, her sea bag over her shoulder, as she makes her way up to the main deck.

She can hear her friends still poking fun at them as they make their way upwards, however, after some blatant ignoring, they finally stop as they make it across the gangplank, and their feet hit the dock leading to shore.

In fact, a complete silence stretches between the six friends as the shuffle towards shore. Their heads moving from side to side, and their eyes widening at their new destination.

"Wow, this place is amazing" Will states as his feet meet the white sand. The others nod in agreement.

The sandy shore doesn't last long as the group of friends make their way into the small port before them. They are instantly greeted by the many vendors around them.

"Come 'ere kiddies, check out our beautiful merchandise!" one man joyously shouts out to them, his native accent strong, as his red hair gleaming in the morning sun, just as Max's does.

The group can't help but smile at the cheerfulness as each vendor

attempts to grab their attention. It doesn't take long for El to realize that Max's red hair, which is a rare marvel in the English colonies, is nothing but normal on this land.

In fact, poor Lucas, Will, and El stick out like sore thumbs among the Irish people with Lucas' dark skin, and El and Will's brown hair. El also notices that most everyone here has fair skin that matches Mike and Max's. And there is actually a good grouping of men and women with coal black hair. Making Mike less of a stand out.

"Ah, look at these wee lassie!" A stout woman steps out from behind her cart of breads and cheeses, and moves towards Max. The woman reaches for the redhead's hand and gives her a slight twirl, in which Max can't help but smile.

"Watcha' doin' comin' off a ship, girlye?" she gives Max a questioning look. El startles a bit at how easily the natives are able to pick Max out as a native.

"I..uhm..." Max struggles with her words, being put on the spot. However, Dustin steps in as he throws an encouraging arm around her shoulder, "We're here to deliver, Maxine here home", he says with a wide smile.

Although, attempting to be heartwarming and generous as he usually is, Dustin's words bring a strong frown across the woman's face.

She gets right into Dustin's face, in which his smile has completely disappeared, and a look of fright replaces it. "Watcha' mean, *deliver*, her home?" the woman almost growls.

"I...uh...I mean...we uh..." and now Dustin is stuttering, caught in a hard place. But, Max steps in and places herself between Dustin and the woman.

"No, it's not like that!" Max tries to pull a smile onto her face to ease the wound up woman, who eye's Max with a worried glance. Max sighs, "I've been stranded from home, for a *very* long time, and these people are my friends, returning me home" she states with a soft voice.

"Stranded?" the woman questions. Max's face falls at her words, but she shakes her head, "Yes, I used to live here, but five years ago, my father and I never returned" she shrugs her shoulders lightly.

"I've been stranded in the English states since then, and.." she turns to the small group that surrounds her, and a soft smile rests on her face, "And I was lucky enough to have such amazing friends who promised to bring me home" she finishes as she turns back to the woman.

The woman eyes her warily, but then a puzzling look crosses her face. "What's your father's name?" she asks Max carefully.

Max lets out a long breath, "His name was Conan Mayfield, he used to Captain the *Crimson Tide*".

And at Max's words, the women's eyes widen, as she shakes her head in disbelief and takes a step back. "It's....it's. Not. Possible" she breaks apart every word.

"We heard...we thought..." she desperately tries to get her words out to Max, but the woman is too blown away to finish her sentence.

Max reaches out and grabs the woman's hand, "I know Aunt Darcy, it's been a long time" a soft smile pulls across her face, as the woman's mouth drops open in astonishment.

"Little, Maxine?" she cries. Max merely nods, but that's all the woman needs to let out a loud cry, in which makes the group of friends jump in surprise as they cover their ears. The woman pulls Max into a tight hug, in which she returns.

"Ohhhh, Maxine....we thought you had..." the woman cries into Max's shoulders. El silently watches as Max too lets a couple tears release from her eyes, and El's heart silently breaks at the tender moment.

The woman, Darcy, finally pulls away from Max, and gives her a beaming look. "Oh, Max, we've got to tell your mother!" she joyously pulls at the girls hand. Max laughs at her movements, but stays in her spot, Darcy jolting at Max's non moving feet.

"My dear girl, we've got to go now!" she continues to pull at the girl,

who chuckles. "Aunt Darcy, I know, that's where my friends and I are headed now" she gestures to El and the others.

Darcy turns to look at them, "Why, are they bringing you?" she questions. Max shrugs her shoulders, "If it wasn't for these guys, I wouldn't have even made it back here".

"They promised they would bring me home, and I want them to meet my family, see the farm, and I know they will make sure I arrive safely" she gives her aunt a warm look.

Darcy is giving a Max a once over, and then she turns to El, Mike, Will, Dustin and Lucas, her eyes scan them up and down, almost as if assessing them to see if they are truly worthy of delivering Max home. Her silence stretches on, but after she gives the group of friends a final sweep with her eyes, her body softens.

"Alright, Maxine, I will allow your friends to bring you home" she pats Max's hand. Max gives her aunt a small nod, "They definitely will" she states.

"Well, before you go, take some bread, and goat cheese too!" Max's aunt begins to scramble behind her small cart as she fetches three loaves of round bread, along with a cloth covering a round wheel of cheese.

Max's eyes widen as she is handed the cheese, she surprises her friends as she bends forward and takes in a big whiff of the cloth. "Oh, I haven't had goat cheese in years!" she exclaims, surprising her friends.

She turns towards them, "You guys will *love* this, trust me!" she all but shouts at her stunned friends who just nod in return.

The loaves are past out among the friends to carry, while Max clasps the cheese to her chest, unwilling anyone else to touch it for now. She turns back to her aunt and gives her a warm smile, "Thanks aunt Darcy, we really appreciate it".

Darcy fashaws Max, and shakes her head, "No, worries my girl, it'll sustain you until you reach the farm" she moves and gives Max one

more lingering hug. As Darcy pulls away, her face is wet with a few tears, and she sniffs, "Now go, your mother has waited long enough" she shoos off Max and the rest of the group.

They all turn and wave and shout, "Thank you's" over their shoulders, as they resume their journey.

El turns towards a smiling Max, she bumps her shoulder lightly, in which causes Max to turn to look at the other girl. "I've never seen you so happy" El states, a smiling dancing across her own face.

Max nods in return as she looks ahead. "Yeah, it's just...so good to be home" her voice drifts off into the wind, her happiness brimming around her.

Dustin bursts in next to El and Max, which pushes the girls apart. They each give him a glare, "So, what did your aunt mean by the food, 'sustaining' us for our journey, I thought your farm was close by?" Dustin asks the redheaded girl, a small smirk dancing on her lips.

She shakes her head, "It's actually a good days walk from here" she admits. And at her words, Will, Mike and Lucas let out low groans, "A *whole* day of walking!?" Lucas whines.

Max turns towards the boys trailing behind them, her hair whipping across her back and over her shoulder. She cracks a wide, knowing smirk, "Yep, come on boys, it's not that bad" she rolls her eyes at them, as she sets her eyes forwards.

El can't help but groan inwardly, hoping to maybe being able to sleep in a warm bed tonight, but from the looks of things, it might not be till tomorrow till she gets that wish.

So, she, and the rest of the group trudge forward.

The sun is just setting down over the rolling green hills. The sky enveloping into a breathtaking yellow and orange blaze. The group can't seem to take their eyes off of the beauty in front of them.

A voice breaks the silence, "There's a small forest up ahead, there

should be a river nearby, we'll camp there for the night" Max points ahead. The rest of the group follow her finger, and they spot the growing rows of trees before them.

Will lets out a tired sigh, "That works for me" he groans.

They finally make their way into the forest and group themselves around a spot of tall, limbering trees, protecting them from any possible elements.

They each reach into their sea bags and pull out thin blankets, as they scatter them out.

"I'm going to go look for firewood, Will, Dustin, Mike you coming?" Lucas points over his shoulder, and the other boys nod and give small voices of agreement.

Dustin stops and turns towards the girls, "Want to fetch some water?" El and Max both nod, "Yeah, we can do that" El states, as Dustin nods and turns to join the boys.

El and Max gather the groups small water canteens as they search for the river. They make their way slowly into the woods, the sun just barley granting them some light.

After a few hundred feet, El's ears perk at the sound of a babbling brook. "There!" she points out to Max, who follows her finger, and smiles at the discovery.

"Wow, it's bigger than I thought" Max admits as they approach the quite large river. El looks over the edge, "Yeah, it looks pretty deep" she assesses the river in front of her.

El dips her hand into the cool water, cupping it slightly, she brings a small handful to her mouth, "Mmm, taste fresh" she says as she pulls one of their canteens forward and dips it into the river.

Max grins at her words, "The water here is always fresh, the mountains make it pure" she says quietly.

El turns to the redheaded girl and watches her, thinking it over in her head if she wants to ask her the question that's been looming in her

mind. And as if Max can literally read her mind, Max sighs, "I know you want to ask" she states quickly, El freezes in her place, "What do you mean?" she tries to play off, but Max scoffs, "I know you want to ask about what Dustin and I talked about" she whispers.

El turns back to the water, now focusing on filling the canteen, not wanting to speak. Max chuckles lightly, "It's okay, I was going to tell you".

And at this El slowly turns her head to look at Max, who is continuing to look at the water. She sighs, "We just said we would see what happens" she lifts her shoulders.

El gives her a questioning look, "What does that mean?" she can't help but ask. Max lets out another long breath, and she finally turns her attention to El. Their eyes search each others.

Max's face contorts slightly, thinking over her words. "I just mean, it's been five years since I've been home, *five years*" she stresses.

She shakes her head, "I don't know how I'm going to feel when I see my mom again, and my sister and brother, I'm not sure if their even going to want me..." she admits, sadness seeping into her words.

El's breath catches in her throat at her statement, "Max, of course they want you home, they thought you were dead", "Exactly!" Max yells at her, startling El slightly. The dark eyed girl can see the worry in Max's blue eyes.

Max turns her head back towards the canteen, she finishes filling it, caps it, and grabs the next one. "Max" El whispers, not really sure as to what to say next.

The redheaded girl just shakes her head sadly, "It's like I'm coming back from the dead, El, they might not even think it's really me".

El thinks over the girls words and lets out her own breath, "Then you'll see, and you'll get your answer, but Max, they're going to be over the moon that you're actually alive" she tries.

Max remains silent, her head still turned downwards. El huffs at the girls stubbornness. They are silent for awhile, nothing but the river

crackling around them.

"I hope he stays" Max finally breaks the silence. El whips her head to the girl, her eyes widen, but her face softens, and she fixes a small smile to her face. "He will" is all El says. And then it's Max's turn to whip her head towards El.

"What do you mean?" Max pushes, El quirks her lip up into a knowing smirk, "I just mean, if he loves you...he'll stay. And I know for a fact that he loves you, Max", El turns her head slightly, and their eyes meet each other once again.

Max relaxes slightly, "I hope you're right El" she admits, as she caps her last canteen and stands, stretching as she does so.

"Come on, hopefully the boys have gotten that fire started" Max notes, with a small eye roll making El laugh.

Thankfully, as the girls make their short journey through the woods, they spot a glow illuminating a small portion of the woods.

Lucas and Dustin are feeding the small fire, while Will is laying down facing the fire, and Mike is off to the side braking branches with his hands.

"Well, nice job boys" Max sing songs as they approach the boys. Dustin rolls his eyes, "What, you thought we couldn't get a small fire started?" he spits back to her.

Both of the girls giggle, answering the question, Dustin opens his mouth to retort, but Max holds up a hand, "Let's not get into it now, we're all starving, so let's eat" she offers as she hands Dustin and Lucas their canteens. El doing the same with Will and Mike. Dustin's mouth hangs open slightly, but he lets out a long breath, keeping his comments to his self.

They all settle around the fire, as they split up the bread between them. They're all about to take their first bite when Max shouts out "Wait!", the group of friends stop their motions and give her a wary look.

"You said let's eat, so that's what we're doing!" Mike argues, but Max pays no attention, as she digs through her bag. When she finally pulls out the cloth from her bag, a wide grin spreading across her freckled face.

"We forgot about the cheese, and you all *have* to try it!" she says eagerly as she unwraps the cheese from its cloth.

No one from the rest of the group had ever tried, nor seen goat cheese before, they all bend forward slightly as Max takes a small knife from her bag. She gently dips the knife into the cheese, and it cuts through with no problem. This startles the rest of them.

"Why is it so soft?" Will scrunches his face slightly. "And what's that white stuff around it?" Lucas crinkles his nose. Max only rolls her eyes at them, "It's because it's *goat's* cheese, it's softer and tangier than cow's cheese, that you're all used to" she explains as she delves out small portions to each of us.

"As for the white stuff, it's actually a natural mold that grows around it" she shrugs her shoulders as if it's no big deal. And at this even El feels unsure with trying it.

They all receive a fairly large portion of the cheese, each of them handling their piece as if it's going to attack them. They turn and watch Max as she eagerly places her piece on her bread, and she takes another long whiff of it, before she bites into the combination. A look of pure joy spreading across her face. The others look on in disbelief.

"Mmmmm, it's so good!" Max moans in ecstasy as she goes in for another bite. She chews it thoroughly, and after she swallows, her gaze turns towards her friends, who are all looking at their cheese with disdain.

She gives them an incredulous look, "What's wrong?" she asks, actually worried. The friends turn to one another, and give unsure glances.

Will's the first to speak, "It's....just different" he admits, and the others nod in return. Max scoffs, "Come on, just try it, you'll love it!"

The group of friends all give each other one more look, El finally shrugs, she looks at her piece, takes in a deep breath and bites down. At first, she's unsure, the soft texture unfamiliar on her tongue, but the tangy smoothness of the cheese finally breaks through. She smiles, "That's, actually pretty good" she states as she goes back in for another bite. Mike sighs, and takes a bite, he nods his head side to side, "It's not bad" he offers with a shrug.

Lucas has a similar reaction to Mike, but Will and Dustin smiling with pleasure like El. "See, told ya guys" Max smirks at them, as they all enjoy their small dinner.

After they all finish their meal, they all lay by the fire, each tucked up into their own blankets. As per the request from the others, Mike and El lay separately apart. Both, silently mourning over their lack of contact with one another.

El sighs, as she turns once again feeling as if a piece of her is lost. The fire has died slightly, but she can make out the sleeping faces of Will, Lucas, Dustin and Max, who are spread out around them. Dustin and Lucas's mouths hang open. While Will and Dustin snore softly. Max is curled up on her side, her chest rising and falling steadily.

El huffs as she sprawls out on her back, unable to fall asleep. She tries to close her eyes, but sleep doesn't come, she sighs again.

"Can't sleep?" a hot breathy whisper catches across her ear, which makes her startle, she moves slightly to see the smirking face of her husband hovering over her.

She settles upon recognizing his face, she lets out a breath, "Jeez, you scared me" she whispers quietly while holding a hand to her chest, her heart beating rapidly.

Mike chuckles quietly, as he bends down, and places a soft, delicate kiss on her cheek, which sends shivers down her spine.

He pulls away slightly, "Want to finish what we started earlier?" his voice is full of lust and want, which makes El's eyes widen. She sits up slightly, looking at her very nearby friends. She gives Mike an

incredible look, "Seriously, right here in front of our friends?" she whispers harshly.

Mike shakes his head wildly, his hair wiping back and forth. "No, not here!" he whispers back, but as he does so, he reaches for her hand. He intertwines their fingers together, as he silently stands, pulling El with him.

With his free hand he puts a finger to his lips, El nods in return, as they tiptoe away from their campsite.

The light of the moon cascades around them, thankfully illuminating their path, as Mike pulls them further away.

El doesn't question his path, and only follows in eager anticipation.

Then, she can hear the soft sounds of the river nearby, and she smiles coyly, she moves so that she is next to him, she raises her voice slightly since they are away from the campsite, "Are we going swimming?" she teases.

Mike laughs, but shakes his head, "No, it might be too cold for that, and I don't want us to freeze all night" he admits.

However, he stops in his tracks, which surprises El, and he pulls her close. "But, I do want to continue what we were doing earlier, I hate getting interrupted like that" he breathes into her ear, and El's skin is set ablaze with goosebumps.

She quirks her eyebrows at her husband, as he continues to pull her along. Soon, he stops in front of a very large tree that is sprouting a large bed of moss beneath it.

He pulls El against him once again, "I think here might be perfect" he says, his voice husky and needy. And instead of answering him, El brings her hand behind his head and pulls him into a deep and needy kiss, in which he eagerly responds.

Mike's hands wrap around her waist, quickly pulling her tucked shirt from her pants, as he pulls it off of her, breaking their kiss for a nanosecond.

And El moves to do the same with his, thankfully his being a button down, allowing them to not break their kiss.

Mike then pushes their bare chests together, which elicits a moan from each of them, as he begins to move pulling them both onto the soft ground beneath them.

They tangle together in a dance that has become well known to them now. However, as they move to become one, their dance evolves into one of much more need.

Their hands grab at the others bare flesh like wild animals, holding onto the other as if it will be their last. Both of their mouths leaking hot breath and soft needy moans.

In the feverous dance, their tongues tangle together as their kisses become more intense. And when their moment reaches to the peak, they both clasp at each other, breathes becoming one, as they ride their high together.

And once settled, they lay bare against one another, holding onto each other tightly, both attempting to catch their breaths.

"Huh, wow...I think that's the most intense love making we've done" Mike jokes as he pulls El closer as he nuzzles her with his nose.

She leans over him, and places a gentle kiss against his bare chest, "I guess you really don't like getting interrupted" she jokes.

He pulls her into a tight hug, and places a kiss on her head, "No, definitely not with this" he laughs as they lay together.

They both gaze up at the moon above them, as they listen to the sounds around them, settling from their high, El feels her eyes grow tired, "I think I can sleep now" she yawns.

Mike laughs again, "Yeah me too" he whispers, as he turns his head towards El, and brings her in for one last lingering kiss.

They dress and silently head back to their campsite, where they find the others are still sound asleep. They bid each other good night, and fall fast asleep.

Yay! I actually got another chapter out within a week!? That hasn't happened for awhile! But really trying to keep up with this story now! And I hope you are all still enjoying it! And I hope you are all okay with me adding some mild lime's in here and there, it just adds to the Mileven story!

And now we are in Ireland, so we are getting there, that's for sure!

Again, and as always PLEASE REVIEW! I love hearing from those who love and or enjoy reading this story, it means a lot!

38. Meeting the Mayfields

Thank you for the reviews from the last chapter! They are always appreciated! And as I promised I'm still working on this story and Watching Her Fall in Love as well. Just been working on this story for a long time, and needed something new. And it is set in the mainstream timeline of the original story. So, there's lots of Mileven fluff in that story as well, so please check it out if you haven't already!

Anyways, let's get on with this story!

Disclaimer: I do not own Bloody Jack or Stranger Things.

El's Point of View:

The morning sun cascades around the group of friends as the cool morning air tucks them deeper into their blankets, they all moan at the fact that they have to get up and moving. However, none of them want to embrace the cold air around them.

But, with some grumbling from Max, whose fairly desperate to get to her family's farm, the group begrudgingly gets themselves ready, and after a small breakfast, they are off once again.

I shiver slightly as the morning dew and heavy fog settles across the rolling green hills. I pull my jacket closer to my body. "How did you stand this cold?" I ask the fiery red head who takes the lead, while another cold chill sweeps through my body.

The girl in question throws her head back to me and smiles, "You just get used to it I guess. I actually hated how hot Florida got, I was miserable there in the hot months", she explains.

I huff as we continue to move along, a cold still chilling deep within my bones. However, through my miserableness I feel an arm wrap around me, I startle at not noticing the presence next to me. I turn my head to and spot my husband who pulls me towards him as he rubs his hand up and down my arm.

Because of their huddle, both of their gates become a little awkward, but I honestly don't care in this moment as I cuddle closer into my husbands warmth. I sigh in contentment, "Hmmm, how are you always so warm?"

Mike chuckles at my words, and I feel him shrug against me, "Guess it's just natural, you like it though, right?" he teases me, and I nod at him, "Yes, especially in this moment" I hum, as we continue to walk snuggled right up next to each other.

We trudge our way through the countryside, the fog slowly lifting, as the clouds dance just at the tops of the hills. Everyone other than Max takes in the beauty of the land around us.

"I just can't believe how *magical* this place seems" Will comments as we are all wide eyed, still continuing to take in everything around us. "It is a beautiful place" Max chirps back to us.

"We're actually *really* close" she states as she comes to the crest of the hill we are climbing. "That's the O'Reilly's farm", she points to a small barn that we can make out in the distance. "And over that hill", she points ahead, the rest of us following her finger, "My family's farm is settled just below, so we should be there in an hour" she shrugs her shoulders.

We all let out sighs of relief, as I'm sure I'm not the only one with aching feet. We are all ready to sit or lay down. However, knowing an end is near, we trudge on.

The sun is just peeking over our heads as we finally begin to climb the final hill, in which we know will be worth it in the end, knowing what is at the bottom.

Knowing that our destination is close, we put in some extra energy and climb with eagerness. Max is just about running up the hill, however, the rest of us don't have enough energy to do so as well, but we all throw smiles around, knowing that Max is about to see her family again.

Max stops at the top of the hill, waiting for the us, as a gentle smile

plays itself out on her face, as she takes in the sight before her. We all finally make it to the top, and we are all desperately trying to catch our breaths, but we all can't help but marvel at the sight before us.

Just below the hill, a small brown farm sits, there are acres of green fields that are filled with a variety of animals. There are multiple sounds coming from the farm that dance across the valley. There's a small white house that sits a bit further from the barn.

"Is that it?" Dustin questions as he points to the house in the distance. Instead of answering, Max only nods, smiling at the valley, as she sighs.

I take this moment and step to stand beside her, I cast my hand out and clasps it together with Max's. The redheaded girl turns her attention to me, "Let's get you home" I smile, while Max grins like a fool and nods her head.

Max lets go of my hand as she bends forward down the hill, and she begins to roll down it, her laughter filling their ears. The rest of watch, as Max somehow gracefully tumbles down the hill. Each of us look at one another, and with a shrug of our shoulders, we mimic Max's movements as we too bend forward and roll down the small hill, laughter erupting from all of us.

We land at the bottom, our hair and clothes disheveled and covered in rich green grass stains. But, our faces are red from laughter, as we each stand to right ourselves somewhat. Once our laughter has subsided, we stand about, our eyes landing on Max, waiting for her to make the next move.

She feels our eyes on her, so she takes in a deep breath and nods, "Okay, I'm ready" she states, and we all follow her to the old white house.

I stand back slightly with Mike, and I gesture for the others to do the same, so as to not overwhelm Max's family. They nod in understanding, and they all pace themselves behind her.

Max approaches the wooden door that has chipped paint peeling from time. She stands there for a moment, taking in the house for a

moment. She then tentatively reaches forward and knocks on the door. The sound reverberates through the home.

We all wait with baited breath, as no noise comes from the house. A moment later, Max reaches her hand up again, knocking with a little more force, as she adds a "Hello!?" at the end. At her words, sound can finally be heard emanating from the house.

Footsteps can be heard approaching the door. A moment later, the door is whisked open, and there stands an older looking woman. I have to do a double take, because I can't help but see so much of Max in this woman. They both have the curling red hair, and a tall lean figure, however, her eyes are a soft green. The woman's hair is also graying, dulling her red sheen. I immediately deduce that this must be Max's mom.

The woman eye's Max, and then she shoots a stare at the rest of the us standing behind her, giving us a steady glare. "Yes?" the woman's voice is soft.

"Uhm-" is all that comes out of Max's mouth, as tears begin to trickle from her eyes. I can tell that Max is stuck for words in seeing her mom again.

The woman gives Max a peculiar look, "What are you all here for, we don't get visitors out this way much" she explains as she stands with her arms crossed.

Max shakes her head, and I watch as she takes in a deep breath and swallows, "I'm..I'm not sure if you'll believe me or not, because...it's been so long but..." Max falters, her blue eyes searching the woman's face.

Max's mother stands with a quirked eyebrow, waiting for Max to finish. "But...it's me...mom...it's Max" she breathes out, her shoulders relaxing slightly at the declaration.

The woman's eyes widen as her arms fall to her side, she begins to shake her head wildly, "No...no!" she shouts, tears beginning to fall from her eyes, this startles Max.

"No...my daughter...she's dead" the woman states as she sniffles. "She died with her father, out in the sea" she begins to weep. And I watch as Max falters, her face and shoulders faltering at her mother's words.

But she doesn't give up, "No, it really is me mom, it's Maxine" she finally reaches out to the woman and grasps her hands tightly, silently begging the woman to look at her. The woman tries to pull away from Max's grasp, but Max doesn't relent.

"No, you're just some kid, who...who, thinks it's funny to play with an old women's-" she stops, when more footsteps come rushing to the door, "Mom, what's going-" a young man with the same red hair as Max's, but his eyes are a rich green, like his mothers, comes to the door. His sights immediately fall on Max, his mouth wide open.

He and Max's eyes catch one another, the young man takes a step forward, "Max?" his voice quivers slightly. Max seems to relax slightly, nodding to the boy. He moves so that he stands in front of her, standing a good inch above her head, "Lenny?" Max's face lights up into a brilliant smile.

Lenny shakes his head and then shouts as he rushes towards her, he sweeps her up into his arms, "Max!" he cries as he holds the girl close to him. And now they are crying into each other.

The others and I soften at the small reunion between the siblings. I can't help but let a tear escape my eyes. I watch as Max pulls away slightly from her brother, whose face is nothing but a broad smile.

"Max, we thought you were dead...after what we heard happened with the *Crimson Tide* and dad too", he explains his eyes going wild. Max shakes her head, "It's a really long story, and I'd be happy to tell you-", "Both of you" she takes a step towards her mother, who is still awe struck.

The woman shakes her head, "Is it...is it *really* you?" she reaches out a wrinkled hand and runs it through Max's hair. Max smiles at the contact. "Of *course* it's Max, mom, she's the only one who got dad's brilliant blue eyes, and don't tell me those aren't dad's eyes" he comments.

Max blushes slightly at his words, but her attention is fully on her mother, who is now searching Max's eyes. And with baited breath between all of us, the woman smiles, new tears cascading down her face, as she pulls the girl into a tight hug. "Oh...my dear Max!" she cries into the girls shoulder, as Max holds her just as close.

"I've missed you so much" Max whispers into the woman's hair. They stand in their embrace for awhile longer, until Max's mom pulls away slightly. She gives a warm smile, "Come, let's get you and your friends some tea", she gestures to the rest of us, as we stand letting the family have their moment together.

We all return soft smiles to the woman, who ushers us into the home. We all step through, as our eyes move around the small home.

I can tell immediately that the home is well loved. There are multiple bushes of dried herbs hanging from the rafters, and the walls are decorated with a wild arrangement of old farm tools, paintings and patchwork. I can't help but feel welcome as we enter into the home where Max grew up.

Max's mom ushers us to the small living room, where there are multiple rocking chairs and stools, along with a lone patched up couch in the corner. We mull around as we each find a seat. We sit in silence, as we wait for Max's mom to return with steaming cups of tea.

We each grab a cup with pleasure, the warmth relieving our cold hands. Sips are heard all around, as we wait for someone to speak. And surprisingly to me, it's Max who speaks up first. "I know you both have a lot of questions, but I want you to meet my friends first", she smiles warmly around to us.

"But first, guys, this is my mom, Harriet, and my brother Lenny", she smiles at the two of them as they give small hellos in return.

She then points first to Lucas, "This is Lucas", he gives a small nod and "Hi". Her finger then moves to the boy sitting next to him, "This is Will", who smiles shyly. I can't help but notice a small blush that comes over her face when her finger lays on the next boy, "This is Dustin", and he gives a cheerful, "Hello!" to Max's mom and brother.

Next she points to Mike who sits beside me on the couch, "And this is Mike", he smiles and whispers a "Hello", and finally her finger lands on me, "And this is Mike's wife, El, she's my only female companion on *The Hawk*" we both give each other knowing smiles, and as I say, "It's nice to meet you" to Max's family.

Harriet's eyes scrunch slightly at Max's last words, "*The Hawk*?" she questions her daughter. Max nods lightly, "Like I said, it's a long story", and at this her mother nods, "Well, I'm ready to listen, then" she states.

Max takes in a deep breath as she begins her story, "It was a couple weeks after dad and I left..."

It seems as if Max's story takes a longer time to tell, now that she can add our little adventures in as well. I watch her mother in interest, seeing her reactions to some of the details that might seem on the more extreme side as Max tells them.

As the afternoon sun moves across the sky, we are all tired and cozied up in our spots. Our tea mugs empty, as Max finishes up her story, "So, we just landed here two days ago, and now...here we are" she shrugs her shoulders as her eyes fall onto her mother and brother, assessing their looks.

Lenny speaks first, "Wow, Max, that's just...crazy" he whispers his last word, in which Max tightens her lip to, looking down at the floor. "Yeah, it was" she says simply.

Harriet has yet to say anything, and Max's attention turns towards the woman, "Are you okay, mom?" she asks the older woman. Her face is still blank, and I can only guess that she's trying to take in everything Max has just told her.

Her soft green eyes seem sad, as she slowly stands to her feet, we all watch as she approaches Max. Harriet places a gentle hand on Max's shoulder, as she plays with her hair that rests there, a soft smile graces her features, she sighs, "You have definitely had the adventure, my girl".

"And it looks as if you have found some wonderful friends as well" she gives us a brighter look as her eyes meet each of ours. "Honestly, I'm just...so relieved to know, that you are alive...it's the best thing a mother could ever ask for" she lets out a long breath, as she bends down and captures Max in another hug.

We all sit in silence as we watch the moment unfold. However, that silence is interrupted by a large growling noise. Our heads all whip over to where the noise emanating from, Dustin sits, with his hand over his stomach, a soft blush growing on his face, "Uh, heh, sorry, hungry" he mutters and we all laugh at the poor boy.

Harriet too is laughing as she pulls away from Max's embrace, "Yes, well you all must be starving after that long trip, let me get dinner prepared", she states happily as she moves towards the kitchen. Max stands quickly, "I'll help you mom". The old woman smiles at the girl, and feeling like I need to be doing something too, I rise to my feet, stretching slightly, "I'll be more than happy to help as well" I state, and at this Max quirks an eyebrow at me, however, her mother chortles, "That would be wonderful dear, I'd love to hear more about you".

She waves her hand towards me as Max and I follow her into the tiny kitchen. She begins to pull out a worn cast iron skillet along with a large deep iron cauldron as well. Although old, she moves with the strength of a young woman. Her eyes are tired and skin wrinkled, but years of hard work on the farm and raising children has made this woman into a strong willed person.

I can't help but smile at watching Max's mother move about the kitchen with ease. She pulls a burlap bag from under the sink and she pulls it towards Max and I. She then moves to one of the drawers and withdraws two knives, she hands one to each of us.

"Hope you remember how to peel potatoes, dear" she jokes to her daughter, who only rolls her eyes in return, "Yes, mom, I don't think I could forget with the *thousands* I've peeled over my life" she laughs.

We both sit across from each other as we reach into the bag and begin to twist the potatoes just right so that the skin peels easily away. I struggle slightly, only having helped the cook aboard *The*

Hawk a handful of times. I stick my tongue between my teeth, as I attempt to peel the potatoes without removing too much of the inside.

I hear Max laugh across from me, I can't help but throw her a look of annoyance, "I'm trying" I grumble to her, and she only laughs more, "You've got to pick a spot and then move the potato, not the knife, you're going to lose a finger your way", she states as she holds up her potato and knife and shows me her process.

I begrudgingly watch the girl as she effortlessly holds the knife firm, as she twists the potato. A neat spiral of skin begins to break away from the potato. And I can't help but be a *little* impressed by her skills.

I huff at the girl, pick up another potato, and try it Max's way. With a couple more pointers here and there, I finally begin to form a rhythm and peel the potatoes much more effectively. I'm definitely not as fast as Max, who is peeling faster than lightning, but, hey, at least I'm helping.

Her mom bangs and clangs around the kitchen, as she fetches this and that, and throws it into the pot, hissing is heard each time something new is added. The smell that begins to fill the air makes my own stomach growl.

"Alright then, now just need some good meat to go with this stew" I hear Harriet mumble to herself as she moves towards the chest freezer. She opens it and 'tsks' closing it firmly. "Bah, not enough for all of you, Lenny!" she calls out, and the boy being beckoned comes out of the living room, where he and the boys have been exchanging stories.

"Yeah, mom?" he questions. She throws a thumb over her shoulder, "Why don't you take them boys and show them how to slaughter up a goat for supper, don't got enough for all of us" she tells her son, who nods in return, as he moves towards the living room, explaining the situation to the boys.

Soon, all the boys shuffle out into the kitchen, their faces whiter than before. My eye catches Mike, and he mouths a "Help, me!" at me, and

I can't help but chuckle quietly to myself. I only just shrug my shoulders at the boy, and return to my peeling. The boys put on their shoes, and walk out the door, almost as if heading to their deaths.

Once they are out of sight, Max and I make eye contact and we burst out laughing, knowing that the boys are about to be in for an experience they won't forget

We are all but finished with the potatoes when Harriet comes back into the house with an armful of carrots. She tosses them down at our feet, "Here ya go girls, some peeling for these ones", Max nods at her mother, and I take in a deep breath, trying to psych myself up for another round of peeling.

Max's mother returns to the cauldron that has been boiling nicely, she stirs it, takes a taste and then searches for another herb to add in. While she is doing this, Max speaks, "Hey mom, where's Ada anyways?" she questions not turning her eyes away from the carrots she is now peeling.

This peaks my interest, "Oh, that's right you've got a younger sister" I half question, half ask. Max smiles, but her mother answers, "Yep, got three of them, Max is the oldest, almost twenty now aren't ya girl?" she question and Max hums in return, "She's got a sister who's just barely a year younger than her, Ada, and Lenny, he came along two years after her" she explains in fondness.

But she smiles at Max, "Well, after your father died, and we thought you were gone too, we struggled" she explained. And at this Max stops her peeling and throws a worried glance at her mother.

Her mother catches this look and brushes her off, "But, you've got nothing to worry about, of course the O'Reilly's helped out something fierce, even more so their eldest son, Emory, who, happened to take a liking to your sister", she explains with a little smile.

"They married almost two years ago, she's got a little girl now too, Ida, sweet little thing, but the O'Reilly's gave us a bridal sum, even though I told them that the kids loved each other on their own, but they wouldn't have any of it" she states with a shrug.

"Ada's married" Max's voice quivers slightly, her body still frozen. I stop my own movements and look at Max curiously.

Harriet takes her attention away from the cauldron as she turns to Max, she gives a small smile, "Yes, she's married, and she'll be so ecstatic to hear that you're okay" she whispers.

But, even with Harriets words, Max remains motionless, her mouth hangs open. "Max?" I try to break her out of her trance, and finally she shakes her head, "I've missed...so much" she says and a sound emanates from her throat that almost sounds like a laugh.

Harriet moves towards her daughter, their eyes meet, "Max, there's a lot we missed about you too, but now...we get to make up for that lost time" the older woman smiles down to the saddened girl. But, I can't help but see a flicker of something behind Max's eyes in her mother's words, and my gut tightens slightly, knowing that there is still fear of what's to be Dustin's decision.

Max's mother pats her hair, and moves back to the cauldron. I pick up my knife and another carrot, I hesitate slightly, my eyes wander over to Max, who is fiddling with her knife instead. I'm pretty sure she feels my sight on her, she turns her head towards me. I attempt to give her some relief in a small smile, which she barely returns. We sit in silence as we finish the peeling.

Max has lightened up slightly as the time passes. Both of our heads are now hovering over the cauldron of soup, we each take in a deep breath as the heavenly aroma fills our nose, our eyes close in ecstasy. "Wow, that smells amazing!" I croon, as my mouth waters slightly.

The red headed girl nods, "Yeah, my moms always been an amazing cook, I can't wait to have her signature stew" she actually gives a genuine smirk.

There's a loud clattering outside, and Max and I turn our attention to the doorway. Will, Lucas, Dustin and Mike enter through the door, their faces have horrified looks upon them. Max and I eye each other, we can't help but giggle.

"How was it boys?" Max teases them. " " Dustin states as he hurries past us and into the living room, Will and Lucas nodding and following behind. Mike stays behind and I simmer up to him, I wrap my arms around his waist and gaze up into his startled face, "Really that bad?" I bite my lip and look into his eyes. Mike shakes his head, "Awful...just...so much...blood" he shivers at the word.

I pat the poor boys back as I lean up and place a gentle kiss on his lips, this seems to lighten him up. He grins down at me, "You're not allowed to see that" he says firmly as he points out the door. I laugh at him, "You don't have to tell me twice".

Just then, Max's brother enters through the door, a very pink carcass is thrown over his shoulders. He lugs the poor thing in, and drops it on the table, like he's done it a thousand times. And I remind myself, *he probably has*.

Mike sees the thing, and I watch his face go white once again. He sputters, "I-I'm going to go join the guys" he pulls away from me slightly and hurries over to the living room. I shake my head watching the poor boy go.

Harriet marvels at the freshly prepared goat and claps her hands together, "Right! Now we're ready for my signature stew!" she moves towards a nearby drawer, and she withdraws a *very* sharp butchering knife. She holds it expertly as she aims her arm high and brings it down on the carcass with a 'whap!' that startles me.

My eyes widen at her movements, I move back slightly, "I'm going to check on the guys" I state lamely, leaving the kitchen in a hurry, not wanting to watch the rest of the meal prepared.

Awhile later, we are all gathered around the Mayfield's table. Our bowls are filled to the brim with stew. Max, her family and I are digging into the delicious stew, however, the boys are all staring warily at their stew.

My eyes wander to each of them. Dustin looks like he's about to puke, and Lucas and Will don't seem far behind. Mike has at least picked up his spoon, and pushes the food around. Harriet notices immediately,

she gives the boys a questioning look, "What's wrong boys?" she asks them.

They all eye each other warily, "Uhm-" Dustin tries to speak, and the others turn away. Max can't help but laugh at them, "Don't worry mom, they're just a little traumatized over the fact that the goat they watched get slaughtered is sitting right in front of them" she states.

The boys go wide at her words, and they now turn their heads down staring at their bowls. Harriet chortles, "Ah, boys, got to get used to that kind of thing, where do you think your meat comes from anyways?" she throws a hand at the boys.

They all shrug megalay at her question. She sighs, "Well, that's all you're getting tonight, or you'll go to bed with empty bellies".

The boys let out their own breaths, I turn to Mike and give him a look of, *just try it*. He gives me a strained look, but with a heavy sigh, he digs his spoon into the stew and brings it to his mouth. He chews carefully, but after a few moments his eyes widen in delight, "Wow, that's really good!" he states as he begins shoveling the stew into his mouth with vigour.

The other boys watch him, as they all tentatively reach for their own spoons as they finally dig into their meal. They copy Mike's delight with the meal, and they moan in satisfaction. Harriet chuckles again at the boys reactions, and they continue our meal with light conversation.

Once our stomachs are filled, our eyelids grow heavy. Harriet pulls out multiple old blankets for all of us. Harriet leads us upstairs where two beds lay neatly made. I desperately want to curl up into Mike's arms on the floor, however, Max's mom *insists* that I take Ada's bed. I sigh and attempt to make an excuse to curl up on the floor with the rest of the boys, but Harriet doesn't let me say no.

So, I pull Mike outside for a proper goodnight kiss, that doesn't involve Max and the boys teasing or groaning at them. I wrap my arms tightly around his neck and he wraps his around my waist pulling me close, and within moments our mouths meet in a long, passionate kiss. Instead of getting heated, it remains soft and pure,

and my heart melts at the contact. We slowly pull apart, our foreheads resting against one another's. Our breaths mingle around us in the cold air.

Mike snuggles his nose into mine, "Mmmm, I can't wait till we're back on the ship, in our own little room". I giggle at his words, "My, Mike, can't not make love for *one* night" I tease him. He huffs at me, "You know it's not that, I just want you wrapped up in my arms", he kisses my temple, as my head rests against his chest.

I sigh in contentment, "It won't be long, we just need to make sure Max is all set before we head back, she's got a lot to think about" I shrug my shoulders. Mike nods his head against mine, he sighs, "It will be weird...Max being gone" he states, and his words startle me slightly, I pull away and look at him. He gives me a look, "What?" he chuckles.

I give him a small smile, "You actually care about her" I tease him and poke him in the chest. Mike scoffs at this, "Yeah, like I'd care about the loud girl who likes to take my time away from my wife" he pulls me close again and I laugh.

We hold onto each other and enjoy the moment together. "I'd be weird if Dustin stays too" Mike whispers against my head. And at this, I heave a heavy sigh, and hold Mike closer, "Yeah...it definitely will" I say sadly. Silently hoping and wishing to myself that we won't have to say goodbye to two friends.

We join the others back upstairs, as we all change into borrowed nightwear. The boys in loose shirts and baggy pants, while Max and I are in long nightgowns.

The boys have each cozied up in different spots of the room. Mike, next to my bed, and Dustin's seemingly close to Max's. We stay up for a while, each of us sharing stories about our times as children, or recounting our adventures together. We laugh and tease one another until our eyelids become heavy.

Soon, the room is filled with soft breaths and Dustin's loud, knowing snores. I can't help but smile at the feeling of contentedness around me, knowing that the closest thing I've had for a family is

surrounding me. A silent tear falls down my face, as I drift off to sleep.

Okay, what did you guys think? Wanted to get this next chapter out before I finish the next chapter to my other story, which I am working on! I just need to finish this one too!

I hope this chapter wasn't too bad, I struggled with the beginning, but got some inspiration as I went.

So, let me know what you think! REVIEWS are greatly appreciated! Thank you!

39. Saying Goodbye

Alright, I got my latest chapter up for *Watching Her Fall In Love*, so now back to this one, trying to flip flop between them, but anxious to finish this one up too! Again, thank you for the reviews, I truly do love reading them!

Anyways, here's the next chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own *Bloody Jack* or *Stranger Things*.

El's POV:

Our first morning on the farm, Harriet enlists the help of all of us with the daily chores on the farm. Of course, we really try to not complain, or show our discontent, hoping we might get a few days off from work. But, we all know that Max's family has taken us in for the following week, and we know we need to pay her back somehow.

Harriet immediately shoos the boys off with Lenny to muck out the animals stalls and stock the feed. I watch the boys attempt to hide their disappointment in having to do such hard work, but they plaster fake grins on their faces and accept their fates.

Harriet assigns Max and I to collect eggs from the chicken coop, and then we are to tend to the vegetable garden. I sigh in relief in not having to do what the boys do and I throw a smirk to Mike who sits next to me, giving me a glare.

After a couple of days, the boys seem to have come to terms with their chores, even after the first day of work they slump into the house, dirty and smelling like manure. Mike attempted to hug me, but I shoved the poor boy away, not wanting to match his smell, until he got himself cleaned up.

And it seemed that every night the boys needed to wash off in the nearby pond, scrubbing profusely at their hair and body with Harriet's homemade soap so that would no longer reek. The boys didn't seem to mind though, for, after they were scrubbed free of the days filth, they would spend their time splashing about and teasing

each other. Max and I sit on the shore watching the boys as they attempt a game of passing an old ball back and forth between each other.

Dustin and Lucas are against Mike and Will. And, I can't help but allow a grin to spread out on my face watching the boys. They bicker and tease, and yell at each other when 'something wasn't fair'. But, in the end all I can see are the four boys I grew up with, and I reminisce about our times together in the bowsprit. I sigh out loud thinking back to these memories, for, they seem as if they only happened yesterday.

Max hears my sigh and comments on it, "What's wrong?", her face come into my peripheral vision. I turn my head and shrug my shoulder at her. She continues to give me a questioning look. I let out a long breath and turn back to the boys who are now attempting to dunk the others under the water.

"It's just amazing as to how fast time has gone by. Watching them, it's like back when we all first joined the ship and we would venture out into the bowsprit together" I smile in fondness. Max giggles, "It's hard for me to imagine the boys as like *kids*" she waves her hands at them.

I laugh in response, "They were a lot like Finny and his lot. All they wanted to be were grand sailors who sailed across the sea. They always boasted their 'courage', but they were stupid too" I shake my head at remembering the antics the boys would get up to.

Max continues to laugh, "Man, I wish I had known them back then, all of you" she admits with a sadness lingering beneath her words. She moves her head, as she tucks her feet up so that she sits on them. She reaches her arm out and plucks at the long blades of grass that sit before her. I watch her as silence settles between us.

It's my turn to be curious, "What's wrong?", I ask her with a bit of tease beneath my voice. Max huffs, and throws a glance in my direction. She shakes her head as her wild mess of hair billows around her, "Nothing", she whispers with no convincing tone in her words.

I bump into her with my shoulder, and she moves slightly, trying to

not play into me. Now I huff at her, "Max, there's something on your mind, you can tell me", I stress to the girl.

Max lets out a long frustrated breath as she hits her hands against the ground hard, her actions startle me slightly, my eyes widening at her actions. "It's just...UGH!" she growls as she throws herself back onto the grass.

I chuckle at the poor girl, who is now covering her eyes with one of her arms as she contemplates her words. I sit, waiting, allowing the girl some time before she answers.

Finally, after what seems like forever, she casts her arms away, as her blue eyes search the sky above her. "I...I've never had friends like you guys before....and, I just feel like we've all just gotten to *really* know each other", she starts, as I come to lay beside her, leaning up slightly on my elbow.

"And...you guys had a lot more time together before we even met, and now...I feel like I'm just going to be...cast off" her voice warbles at her last words, and my heart becomes heavy.

"Max, you know that's not true, you can still come with us" I point out to the girl. But, this only seems to upset her more, as she springs forward suddenly, her eyes piercing mine deeply, "But, I *can't* that's the point, El" her eyes begin to drip with tears, as I give her a questioning look.

"What-" I try to speak, but Max cuts me off, "You heard my mother, she's looking forward to the future now that I'm home, I can't just...up and leave, *again*" she stresses. Through her whole venting process she had begun to viciously attack the blades of grass in front of her. And at 'again' she throws the blades into the wind.

My eyes follow the strands of grass that don't make it very far, as the wind whips them up and carries them off, they delicately lay against the earth once again. My attention then returns to Max, who's desperately trying to not let loose a flood gate of tears. My heart truly aches for the girl, and it seems any words won't soothe her. So, instead I reach out my arm, and gently place a hand on her shoulder.

She's taking in deep breaths, and snuffles lightly. And after a few beats, she finally turns her head to me, and she gives me a small smile. "Thanks for...just being here, El" her voice is thick with sadness, but I give her a nod as I pull her into my side, and she rests her head against my shoulder.

We turn our attention back to the boys, who are now taking turns racing across the small pond, trying to determine who is the fastest. I gaze at them with a soft fondness, reminding myself that there are times where this innocence still needs to be shed. That, we all deserve moments like this, where we can just be who we all are.

My heart soars listening to the boys goad each other and their yells and screams of joy. Max and I sit, enjoying their voices, as the sun begins to set across the high hills.

Eventually we hear a call behind us, "Kids, dinner!" Harriets voice echoes across the ground, as Max and I turn our heads towards the call, and the boys stop their play.

"Aww, already?", I hear Dustin's distraught voice from the pond, so I turn my head back to him, and I can't help but let out a laugh at all the boys faces that are turned into disappointed frowns. Max must see them too, because I feel her chuckling against my shoulder too.

We both stand as the boys trudge out of the water. Their undergarments are soaked, as their bodies drip off the extra water that has formed on their bodies. Just as they approach the edge, a cool wind whips across the hills, ruffling mine and Max's shirts, as the boys quickly throw their arms around their waists, shivering slightly.

"God that's cold!" Lucas chatters as he approaches Max and I, who have kept an eye on all of the boys towels. I hand one to the boy, who accepts it with a "Thanks!" as he throws it around himself.

Dustin and Will approach Max, who gladly accept the warm towel from the girl. Mike is the last to approach, and I chuckle as I hold the towel out for him. I quickly catch the look on his face, but I can't react fast enough, because in a blink of an eye, he sprints towards me and I squeal, startled, as Mike wraps his cold arms around me,

spinning me into the air.

"You're so cold!" I shout to him as he tries to get me wet. He's laughing wildly as he finally sets me down. I fix him with a hard stare, as I look down at myself, and my poor shirt and pants are now very wet and very cold.

Everyone else is laughing at us as well. I quirk an eyebrow at my husband, who now has his arms wrapped around himself again, trying to keep warm. "You should have seen your face" he chuckles as he approaches me again, reaching for the towel.

However, I pull it away from him. This gets him to stop laughing, he throws me a look, "Can I have my towel?" his teeth are now chattering, but I honestly have no sympathy for him. I shake my head at him, "After what you just did? I think this is *my* towel now" I say pulling the towel around me and letting out an exaggerated sigh at its warmth.

Mike gives me a leveled stare, "Come on El, I'm freezing!" he attempts to reach for the towel again, but I pull away quickly. "Well, you should have thought about that before getting me all wet because now *I'm* cold, and it's your fault" I give him a quick look.

Our friends let out low 'Ooos' around us as we pick at each other. Mike's mouth is hanging open in shock, but he shakes his head as he moves towards me again, "Seriously El, I'll get sick if I don't get warm" he tries to play the guilty party, but I will have none of it.

I take a couple steps backwards and shake my head at him, "No" I state firmly. And now Mike is giving me a wild look as he takes a step towards me, but I move away. He huffs, and I think he's given up, but, instead he lunges forward, and I just barely miss him as I begin to jog back to the house. I cast my head back over my shoulder and laugh, "You'll just have to catch me then!" I throw back to my poor husband, who I can hear growling as he takes off after me.

I hear the cheer of our friends trailing behind us, different voices cheering either Mike and I on. Both Mike and I are quick footed, and I serpentine through the long grass, as I giggle at his attempts to grab me.

The old farmhouse comes into view, and I stop just at the edge of the house, and immediately after I put on the breaks, I feel arms come around me, as I hear a "Gotcha!" in my ear. Mike spins me again, and we are both laughing.

He sets me down and gives me a look, "Can I *please*, have the towel, I'm sorry for getting you wet" he gives me his wide eyes, which immediately make me melt. I shake my head at him as I unwrap the towel from around me and throw it over my husband, who sighs in relief.

The others catch up behind us, their breaths coming hard and fast from trying to keep up with us. "Aww, you gave it to him?" Will shakes his head at me. I just shrug at him, "Yeah, can't have him getting sick" I state, sticking my tongue out at my husband, who rolls his eyes at me as we continue into the house together.

Third Person

The boys head upstairs to change into warm clothes, El follows behind them to grab a new set of clothes as well, wanting to change out of her damp ones. El, however, moves to a spare bedroom to change there.

El shuts the door behind her. She takes in her surroundings, her hazel eyes searching the room. She spots an unused bed in the center of the room, and a wide range of a variety of things that are scattered about. El remembers to herself on the tour with Max that she had pointed out that this was a spare room used for when company came over.

After gazing around, El places her new clothes on the bed, she flips off her shirt quickly and attempts to begin to strip out of her wet clothing. She grunts as she struggles to get out of her pants as they are tight to her skin from getting wet, she sighs. El dances and fumbles around as she tries to get free.

El gives herself a silent cheer of victory once she has them off. However, through her distraction, she doesn't hear the door open and close, behind her, instead a quick, 'click' that sounds like a lock, gains

her attention. Before she can turn around, warm hands are on her, as hot breath breaths into her ear, she startles slightly, "What, don't like changing in front of your husband?" Mike's voice is taunting, and she can't help but bend back into his embrace.

El hums, as Mike's hands begin to wander all over, as he places gentle kisses against her bare skin. "I don't like changing in front of the others, obviously" she answers sarcastically, as she slowly closes her eyes, melting into Mike's hands.

But, she has little time to think, as Mike flips her around quickly, and his mouth is on hers in an instant. The kiss is hot and tempting. El buries her narrow fingers in Mike's still wet and curly hair, pulling him against her. Their bare chests pressing firmly against the other. She sighs at the contact.

El can feel the temptation within her building, the need stirring deep within her. When, a thought dawns her, she pulls away quickly, holding back Mike's head so that she can look him in the eyes. What she meets are two dark pools that are blown in full lust, and she's pretty sure hers are the same.

She gives him a quick smile, "Mike, we can't.." she whispers hurriedly to the boy, wanting to calm the situation before it gets to a point where she can't say no. Mike laughs into her face, "Five minutes, the guys are getting dressed, it'll be quick" he nuzzles his nose against her, while also grinding his arousal against her hips.

She can't help the moan that escapes her mouth, in which Mike silences with his lips chasing hers. "You'll have to be quiet though" he smiles against her mouth.

El can feel the need and want pounding within her. Mike continues to slowly rub his hips against hers, and she returns the pressure, causing him to moan lowly in the back of his throat, and the point of no return hits her.

"Quickly" is all she says, before Mike's mouth is on her once again, as they tumble to the bed beside them. And El has to admit to herself, the adrenaline that pumps through her as Mike makes steady work of both of their pants, all while only breaking their heated kiss for a

second. He slides into her in one fell swoop, and soon they are thrown into a quick moment of pleasure and satisfaction.

Their kisses grow hot and fierce as their bodies move against one another in attempt to bring the other over the edge. They each chase the others moans as the pleasure flows through them. And, with the rush and excitement of their deed, they both reach their release together, as they hold in their moans and fall flush against each other.

Their chests heave up and down, as they catch their breaths. When their eyes meet each other, at the contact they both let out a fit of giggles as El holds Mike to her chest. El places a soft kiss against Mike's head as she murmurs and, "I love you" into his locks.

Mike pulls away slightly, and places a gentle kiss on her nose, "I love you more" he breathes down to her. And they both sigh in contentment, as they pull away, resuming getting dressed. El tugs her shirt over her head, and struggles with the tie in the back, she huffs.

Mike chuckles at her attempt so he moves towards the girl, "Here, I'll help" he states as he grabs the ties behind her and gets her synched up quickly. "There" he states, with his hands now on her hips, turning her towards him. They give each other tender smiles, as they both fill the space between them with a gentle kiss.

El slowly wraps her arms around her husbands neck as they deepen the kiss. After a couple moments she feels Mike's hands traveling south, so she pulls back with a knowing grin and look to the boy. "What?" he says innocently and El only shakes her head, "Nope, don't start, we've got to get back downstairs".

Mike sighs, "Come on, I could be quick again" he teases as he pulls the girl against him, both of them giggling. "Mike!" she groans, as she tries to pull away from his embrace, but failing miserably.

They are wrapped up in one another, giggling together when they hear a sharp pounding against the door, "Come on guys, dinners ready!" Dustin's booming voice startles them apart. El watches as Mike rolls his eyes, as he approaches the door. He flicks the lock and pulls open the door, and to El's surprise their friends stare with

knowing glances and hidden smiles. El's face reddens.

"We were coming, El needed help tying her shirt" Mike lied smoothly, in which even El bought, so she tries to follow his lead. "Yeah, I caught him going to the bathroom, and pulled him in to help" she shrugs coming to stand beside her husband.

"So, tying a shirt takes ten minutes?" Max raises an eyebrow to both of them, but her knowing smirk falls on El. At this, Mike fumbles slightly, so El speaks instead, "We were just talking" she tries, shrugging her shoulders in return.

And at this, now even Will has knowing eyes on the girl. Instead of arguing more, Max moves forward, pushing both Mike and El out of the way, both saying, "Hey!" as they are pushed. And once Max is in the room, she lets out a loud laugh, she points to the bed, in which El's eyes widen in horror.

"Oh, totally just 'talking'" Max quotes as she moves passed them again, "Don't think the bed would be so disheveled if you were just 'talking'" she repeats as the rest of the gang begins to laugh as well.

Both Mike and El's faces turn very red. They sigh in defeat, "Whatever guys, let's just have dinner", Mike places a gentle hand behind El to lead her downstairs and through their pestering friends.

"Poor Mike, can't keep it in his pants!" Max taunts after them as they head down the stairs, Mike growling at the girls' remark. However, El giggles lightly at her words. Mike throws a wild look at his wife, who shrugs, "Well...you couldn't" she giggles again, as Mike moves away from her and heads towards the kitchen.

After being caught, their friends continue to pick and tease the poor couple over dinner. Playing off jokes that go over Max's mom's head, in which both Mike and El are grateful for.

Once dinner is complete, they stay up playing old card games together and laughing into the night. They turn into bed, so that they are ready for the next day.

The days seem to pass quickly on the farm with each day being filled with different chores for each of them to do. They all slump in exhaustion at the end of each day, their bodies heavy with fatigue. Each of them silently waiting for the day they return to the ship, where, they don't have to deal with animals.

And, within a blink of an eye, that day comes after the group has spent two weeks on Max's family farm, where it is time for them to depart.

They groggily get up, dressed and head down for their typical breakfast. The mood is thicker this morning, knowing, that at least one of their friends will be staying behind. So, they eat mostly in silence.

Once breakfast has been completed, everyone moves to pack their bags as they ready themselves for the long journey ahead of them. El and Mike are the last in the bedroom as they fold the rest of their clothes.

El heaves a heavy sigh that gets Mike to look up, "You okay?" he asks, watching his wife somberly pack her things. She doesn't look up from her bag, and doesn't answer him. Mike moves so that he is behind her and he wraps his arms around her front, holding her close. He rests his head against her neck and kisses her gently. At his actions, he feels El begin to shake, as she lets out a gasp of breath.

Mike lifts his hand and turns El's face to him, which is now wet from her tears. She turns and flings herself into his arms as they embrace one another. Mike rubs a soothing arm up and down her back as he consoles her as she cries.

"Shhh, it's okay El, everything will be okay" he tries to comfort her, but she shakes her head into his chest, "I have to say goodbye to my friend Mike...I don't want to!" she cries as fresh tears trickle down her face, some staining Mike's shirt.

Mike pulls her closer to him, "We can visit her, write letters, whatever to make you feel like you aren't losing a friend" he whispers into her hair. El only sobs more, attempting to muffle them in Mike's shirt. And they stand together for awhile, Mike allowing El to get out

her sadness that has been enveloping her for awhile.

Eventually, El's cries stop and she slowly pulls away, Mike still holding onto her lightly, he nuzzles her so that she looks up to him, her eyes watery. "Hey, don't worry okay, I promise things will get better" he says as he brushes a stray hair out of El's face. El sniffles at his response, meekly nodding her head, as she pulls away, and finishes packing her bag.

Mike gives her one last look as he holds out his hand to her, she takes it, thankful for his warm offers, as they make their way downstairs.

They are met in the kitchen with soft voices of their friends who stand about, waiting for them. When they make their way into the kitchen, all eyes fall on them, and the sound stops as well.

They all stand about, silently taking in one another, not really sure where they all stand. Max finally breaks the silence, "You guys should get going, Hopper won't wait" she tries to joke, as everyone attempts small smiles.

The group moves outside, however, Harriet stops them, "Kids, go get the horses saddled up, and the cart on the back, no point in you all walking back to the docks, you'll get there by sunset", she nods towards the stables. "And, that way we can all go with you to say goodbye" the older woman smiles brightly as she gestures towards Max and Lenny.

This gets the group to smile as they quickly get the horses saddled, and the cart ready to go. Harriet and Lenny ride the two horses in front, while the rest of them pile uncomfortably into the uncovered cart, however, there are few complaints as they are all excited their goodbyes can wait a couple of hours.

There is laughter and joking that streams from the cart as the friends enjoy their time together. Stories are told and memories are reminisced as the hours tick by. The group doesn't even notice the ocean in the distance that marks their arrival to the docks. But, once they do, they become silent once again.

Harriet and Lenny pull the horses off to the side, as the gang steps

out of the cart, their bags totting behind them. They all walk slowly down to the docks, where they can all see *The Hawk* is ready to make sail.

Harriet, Lenny and Max walk the gang to the ship, and as they approach a loud voice echoes down to them, "Good to see you kids back, it was quiet without ya!" Hopper says as he waves down to them. At seeing Hopper, El's heart grows slightly, being happy to see the man again. But, it is quickly diminished as she, Mike, Lucas, Will and Dustin stand on the docks, looking sadly at Max.

"Promise you'll write" Max whispers to the gang, and they all smile. Will is the first to step forward, "Only if you'll write too" he smiles as he moves forward and wraps the girl in a tight hug. Max smiles brightly as she wraps her arms around the smallest boy laughing, "Of course I will" she says as she pulls away from the boy.

She ruffles his hair, "Thanks for being a good bunk mate" she smiles at him, he returns it, "Well, thank you too" he nods as he moves out of the way for Lucas to step forward, he and Max wrap each other in a tight hug, "Take care red" he whispers to her, "You too, stalker" she smiles to the boy as he moves for Mike to give her a hug.

"Take care of our girl" Max whispers to the boy, Mike hums, "Thank you for being a friend, she really needed another girl aboard" he smiles as he pulls away.

Next, El steps forward, and it's in that moment that both girls fling themselves into the others arms, as they let the tears fall. The boys who stand and watch allow a couple tears to shed as they watch the two girls embrace.

Max and El sway with each other as they hold on tight to everything their friendship means to them. "Don't be a stranger, okay?" El says to the girl as she pulls away, Max nods, "Don't let the boys pick on you too much either, and make sure Mike treats you right" she gives El a look. El chuckles through a watery smile, "You know he treats me right", El states in which Max sighs, as the girls hug each other one last time, and slowly pull away.

El steps aside for their last group mate to say goodbye. And here, El

watches as the two struggle to find words. But, Dustin moves first and pulls the redhead into his arms, Max's face falls as she sobs even more.

"I...I don't want you to go", Max cries through her tears. Dustin squeezes the girl tighter in his arms, "Do you mean that?" he asks, pulling away slightly, both of their blue eyes searching each other. When, finally Max nods, "No, I...I don't want you to leave" she admits with a long breath, and Dustin smiles a wide grin.

"I don't want to be away from you either" he admits as he tucks her flying hair behind her ear. Dustin face falters slightly, "But, what do we do?" he asks as his blue eyes search hers. Max opens her mouth to speak, but a voice behind her speaks up instead, "You'll go with him, of course".

All eyes fly to Harriet, who stands with a bright smile on her face. Max's mouth hangs open, "But, mom wha-" she tries, but Harriet holds up a hand to stop her words. Harriet moves so that she is holding Max's hands, "You, my oldest girl, you enjoy this world with your friends, they are where you truly need to be" she gives her a warm look.

Tears trickle from Max's eyes, "But mom, you said...y-you wanted to get to know me-" she shakes her head. Harriet chuckles lowly, "You don't know how happy I am, how happy I felt, when I learned that you were alive, my heart felt full again" Harriet explains to her daughter.

"But, you weren't meant to spend your life on a farm, you deserve the life *you* want" Harriet says as she reaches out and places a gentle hand on Max's face. "Mom" she whispers. Harriet beams at her daughter, "That doesn't mean I don't want you to not visit, okay?", she gives her daughter a look.

Max nods her head as tears still fall from her face, but a warm smile graces her features. She then pulls her mom into a tight embrace. "Thank you" she whispers into the older woman's hair, who only laughs lightly, "No, thank you my dear Max, for coming home" she smiles as tears pool from her eyes as well.

Max pulls away slightly, but then a surprised look forms on her face, "Oh but my bag, all my stuff!" she says exasperated, but then Lenny walks forward, Max's sea bag in hand. "We figured we'd bring it along...just incase" the older boy shrugs as he bends down to envelop his sister into one last hug as well.

"You two are amazing" she breaths to both of them as she gathers both of them into one last hug. Max steps away, moving to join her friends, who welcome her with open arms as they embrace together, laughing and cheering wildly.

"Take care of her, all of you!" Harriet points to her daughters group of friends, who all nod wildly in return. "Don't worry Mrs. Mayfield, she's in good hands!" Lucas cheers.

"Thank you for everything!" El calls to Max's family, and the others bellow out 'thank yous' too. They all give Max's family one last look, as they all take their first steps onto the gangplank, as they walk back onto their familiar home.

They all rush about, Lucas climbing to his rigging spot, Mike and Will are on the ropes, as the gangplank is pulled up onto the ship. Max, El and Dustin run to the edge of the ship, where Max's family stands waving up to them. "Bye Max, we'll see you soon, please write to your old mother occasionally too!" Harriet shouts up to them.

Max waves back down, "Bye mom, bye Lenny, love you guys, I promise to write!" she shouts down. They continue to wave at the two, until a loud, "Lower the main sails, hull up the anchor!" is shouted across the ship. And as if in perfect harmony, everyone on the ship moves in synchronicity.

The sails tumble down from their holds, as the fresh clean air whips them open with a shuffling 'whack!'. The line of men on deck move in a circle as the anchor is hulled up on deck. A low whistle is heard, then the familiar sound of Hopper's voice fills their ears, "Cast off!" he shouts. And within moments, *The Hawk*, begins to move forward with the winds in its sails. Cheers are shouted about the ship.

El turns away from Dustin and Max who are still waving to her family. She moves so that she finds her husband who is standing off

to the side, heaving slightly from raising the anchor. She gives him a winning smile.

He quirked an eyebrow at her, "What's that for?" he quips at her. El moves and hugs her husband tightly, "Just, happy is all" she hums to herself, as her eyes fall onto Max and Dustin who are locked in passionate kiss. El's smile brightens.

"Ready to go home?" Mike moves his head so that El can hear him. El snuggles into his chest and sighs, "I'm already home" she whispers to him. He hears a deep chuckle in his chest as he kisses her head. Both of them turning to watch the setting sun on the horizon. Knowing that their next destination is only a small piece of what they call *home*.

Yay! I struggled with that chapter, I honestly just wanted to get out of Ireland and get them back to England! Because I know you guys have been dying and asking for it as well! And truthfully, this time, I'm nearing the end, maybe a few more chapters and then this story will be complete!

So, let me know what you thought about this chapter, I know it was rushed, but I hope you all understand!

As always, REVIEWS are always welcome!

P.S: Happy Stranger Things Day! I was hoping soooooo much that they would release a trailer, but, alas, I have not seen anything yet :(

40. Reunion

Alrighty, I think this is the chapter in which many of you have been asking and waiting for, but, you'll have to read it fully to see if it really is ;)

Hope you all enjoy this next chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own Bloody Jack or Stranger Things.

El's POV:

There's a lot of excitement that buzz's through the ship as we make our way to England. Everyone has been itching to make it to this particular destination because, for most of us on the ship, it is our home.

And because of the war that has stretched between the mainlands and monsters, we haven't set foot on our homeland since we left, which, was almost seven years ago.

I sigh, as I continue to finish up Mr. Clark's book we have worked together on for the last couple of years. He wants it finished by the time we hit the mainland, so, I've spent almost all of my free time making sure each picture he wants within the book is completed.

I've allowed my mind to wander on this particular day, because I know we are close to land. We had left Ireland almost a week and a half ago, so, England is only a couple days away.

My mind wonders how it has changed. Are there any new shops? New people? But, in my heart of hearts, I'm hoping that the home I grew up in, and the one person who stayed behind is still intact.

"Seven years", I mumble to myself as I place my chin on my left hand as I lazily finish up another fine stroke against the paper with my right. I watch silently as the water colors I have just added to the paper soak into the grain and add a rich hue to the other colors already painted.

I cast my gaze out the port window in front of me. *The Hawk* sways

gently against the calm waves of the ocean. It's a beautiful sunny day, and I silently wish to be up on the main deck basking in the warmth, for, I know returning to England means that there will be less sun to enjoy.

But, I can feel my heart race against my chest as I know I am excited to finally return home. Mike has talked my ear off about introducing me to his family. "They are going to be so surprised when I not only bring home a girl, but my *wife*!" He had told me excitedly the first night we headed out from Ireland.

He went on and on about his sisters, who, he can't wait to see Holly, because she'll be almost ten years old by now. And Nancy, he wonders if she had been married off yet and has a family of her own. But, he's even more excited to be able to share the brave adventures and achievements he was able to partake in while out at sea.

Mike had explained to me in detail about how his dad had never really expected much from him. But now, he could show him his dark new midshipman uniform, along with all the little trivets he had earned upon our voyage. And, according to Hopper, once we had hit land, we were to be presented with medals of honor from the King himself. And, our ship in particular would be honored highly.

I'm brought back to reality as a particularly large wave picks up *The Hawk* and drops it down in such a way that turns my stomach as we drop back down. I grasp at my stomach lightly, not liking those big waves as much as I did when I was a kid. A wave of nausea hits me. I take in a deep breath, not wanting to be sick.

It takes a couple of deep breaths and keeping my head down for the sickness to pass, and I let out a sigh of relief when it passes. I've found that the rougher seas don't agree with me as much as they used to. And, according to other veterans of the sea it happens over time, your stomach not handling the waves so well.

So, for me, getting to land is much more exciting in the ways of feeling better again. I turn my attention back to my drawing, but I don't get very far when a voice breaks my attention.

"El?" a small voice is heard from behind me. I turn ever so slightly to

look over my shoulder, I immediately want to throw a couple of words at whoever is disrupting me, but, upon seeing a young face peeking through the doorway, my irritation settles.

"Oh, Finny, come in, what's up?" I say to the boy, well, not so much *boy* anymore, neither he or the rest of his little gang. The growing teen approaches me slowly, a plate in his hand, he gestures it to me.

I startle slightly at realizing it must be lunch time. He and the other boys had been making it a habit of coming and making sure I eat, and my suspicions is that my husband wants to make sure I'm thoroughly fed through the journey.

"Lunch already?" I give him a small smile, as he places the plate of bread, cheese and a couple hunks of meat beside me. He nods at my words, "Yes, need to make sure you're eating" he shrugs his shoulders at me.

"You mean my *husband* wants to make sure I'm eating?" I say with a tone of amusement casting a look at the teen. I watch as his face blushes, knowing that my hunch was correct.

I tug at a lone stool next to me and pull it out, "Come, sit, tell me what's new?" I pat the stool next to me, as the teen comes and sits down on it. I watch his gangly limbs, as he fumbles with the seat, and I can't help but admire the boy. He has filled out quite well over the couple of years.

And I still can't help but see a small hint of Mike behind his look, however, as he has gotten older, his hair isn't as curly as Mike's, nor is it as black. Finny's hair has a light brown tint to it now, and his freckles have dissipated somewhat. But, there's a small look that he gives me that is the spitting image of Mike, and this makes my heart squeal in delight.

We take in each other for just a moment. Assessing if there is anything new about us. Since everything that has happened and he and his posse of boys have grown, they have moved up in ranks as my crew and I have. So, instead of being their babysitter, they have grown to take care of themselves, taking on more responsibilities, as have I.

My heart ached slightly on the day, many months ago, when Hopper moved them up in ranks and told me, "They're old enough to look after themselves El, once less thing you have to worry about".

Even though I knew I was supposed to be relieved of being released from 'ship boy' duty, my heart sank at Hopper's words. Knowing, that I would be seeing less of them, as my duties too, increased.

The boys seemed to have had the same reaction, as their faces fell slightly at Hopper's words. But, being a direct order from the Captain, they knew they could say no word on it. Instead, I hugged everyone of them, and congratulated them on their adventures.

Since then, I could only manage a wave, or quick, 'hi', here and there, passing each other on the ship. So, in this moment, it was nice to have an actual conversation with the growing boy.

"Are you excited?" Finny asks me, pulling me out of my memories. I startle at his words, and look down to my painting, "Excited for what?" I ask him.

Finny furrows his brows at me, "Uh, to go home?" he says as if it's the most obvious thing in the world. *Right*, passes through my mind, so I nod my head slowly, "Oh, yeah...of course, just...a lot on my mind is all", I shrug my shoulders, as I reach out my hand and pull a small piece of the bread apart, popping it into my mouth.

I hear Finny hum at my answer. I turn back to my painting, not really doing much, just trying to keep myself occupied. "What about you?" I ask the teen, not looking up from my piece.

"I'm excited to see London, it's supposed to be beautiful" he says, his voice no longer squeaking through his changes, but it is now a low tone.

I stop my movements and slowly look up at the boy, for, I can hear a slight hesitation in his voice, "What's on your mind, Finny?" I question him as I tilt my head at him.

He shrugs his shoulders high and drops them quickly, not wanting to make eye contact. I give him a slight shove, which almost sends him

teetering from his stool. "Hey, be careful!" he throws at me with a scowl. And I can't help but laugh at the poor boy, "You know you can talk to me", I tell him.

The boy finally looks at me, his eyes searching mine, he then looks down, "Are...are you staying?" is what he asks, and it's my turn to give him a confused look.

"What do you mean?" I ask the boy, who still doesn't look up. "I mean...you and Mike, and the others, this is where you grew up", he says.

And realization dawns on me, and now, my mind fills with questions. With all the excitement of returning home, Mike and I had yet to discuss what our future plans were. Were we going to stay? Would we travel more? What was our plan?

Worry must etch my face because Finny says, "El?", and I get out of my head, looking at him, as he gives me a concerned look. I know exactly why he is asking this question, because, he too, doesn't know what his next step will be.

But, looking at the boy, I reach out and take his larger hands in mine. I let out a long breath, "Finny, you can do whatever you want, and do what you please. I don't know what mine and Mike's plans are just yet, but know that no matter what happens...we will always remain close" I whisper to him.

I watch as his eyes connect with mine, a sad look befalls him. "It'll...just be hard, you've...you've been like a mother to me since we boarded this ship, even before I knew you were a girl" he chuckles.

I laugh with him as I squeeze his hands, "I know Finny, and it's not easy for me either, but...like every mother and child, we have to let our children find their own way" I say softly. And at this Finny nods, and smiles widely.

"Thanks El" he breathes as he begins to stand, and I follow him. He moves to leave but I pull on his hand and pull him to me. He is already a good inch taller than me, which annoys me slightly, but I silently enjoy the hug as I pull him into me.

He tentatively wraps his arms around me, and eventually he returns the hug. "You'll always be special to me, Finny" I breath into his chest, and he chuckles, "And you'll always be special to me too, El".

We hold onto each other a little longer, and Finny is the first to pull away. He gives me a soft smile, "I've got to get back, Lucas isn't always the kindest when I take a long lunch" he smiles as he walks away. I giggle, "Well, tell him you had to visit someone" I throw him a wink, which makes him blush as he makes his way back up to the main deck.

I watch his figure retreat up the stairs, and I sigh gently, turning back to my work, now knowing, Mike and I have to discuss a few things.

Finally, when our shifts end, and the crisp, white moon begins to rise above the horizon, Mike and I find ourselves laying in our comfy little room.

He's quite exhausted from his days work, as he collapses against our small bed. I listen as he takes in a deep breath and exhales deeply, "Man, I can't wait to take a break from this" he sighs as he turns to face me.

I turn towards him as well, only our eyes sparkle in the little amount of moonlight that comes in from our porthole. "Hi", he whispers, as I giggle and roll my eyes at him, "Hi", I return.

He snuggles up close to me, and we lay in silence for a little bit, a questions sits at the tip of my tongue. "Hey Mike?" I whisper into the night. "Yeah", he says quietly too.

I hesitate for a moment, but I know I have to have this question answered, "When...when we make land, what is our plan?" I put the question out on the table. I wait as I listen to Mike's breath even out beside me. "What do you mean?" he questions back.

I reach out a hand and rub his arm slowly, "I mean...what's our plan, where are we going to live...wha-" I try to finish but Mike's low laugh makes me stop, "What's so funny?" I quip at him.

I feel Mike shake his head against the sheets, "El, we can stay with my parents until we figure out a living situation, remember what Hopper said? *The Hawk* is going to be docked for a couple months, and we'll have more than enough to live off after we get our shares" he says gently, as he too reaches out and strokes my cheek.

I let out a long breath as I melt into his touch, "What if they don't like me?" my voice is soft against the darkness. Mike's hand freezes against my cheek, "My parents? Ha, El, that's crazy, they're going to love you, especially my mom, she was always after me to find the perfect girl. Little did she know I'd meet her on the ship I was traveling on" he laughs.

The way he speaks that is so soft and soothing allows me to relax. A gentle smile pulls onto my face, "You really think so?" I ask him. I feel Mike move, and I squeal quietly as I feel him roll onto me, I giggle as his movements, "Eleanor Wheeler, you should have no doubt in your mind, there's no one we haven't met who doesn't like you, I mean, I'm pretty sure I fell in love with you the moment our eyes met" he whispers down to me. He leans in, his hair tickling my face as he places a gentle kiss on my forehead.

I reach forward and place my hands on his shoulders, sighing. "I guess I'm just nervous...we...we have to find out if Joyce is okay too" I say quietly up to Mike. I hear him hum above me, "We will, we'll all go together to find her, okay?" he says gently as he moves to my side and tucks me into him.

"Don't worry El, everything will work out in the end, I promise" he nuzzles into my neck. I giggle once again, "Promise?" I quip back with a teasing smile on his face. He laughs, "Promise", he says as he lays his head down besides mine, as we drift off to sleep.

In two days time, just as the afternoon sun rises high into the sky, we finally see it. I'm thankful that I'm on deck when the lookout from above shouts, "LAND HO!", from the crow's nest. And I'm pretty sure every seaman who is not actively participating in something runs from their places, and moves towards the edge of the ship, me included.

I speed over to the side of the ship, Will pops up right beside me, and there, in all its glory, is London, England, our home. Cheers and loud whoops ring across the ship, everybody anxious to finally make landfall.

I turn to Will, he has a look of awe on his face, and I can see tears pricking at the edge of his light eyes, which in turn makes me teary as well.

"Do you think she's there?" the question comes unexpectedly out of Will's mouth, and I startle slightly. His eyes move from the land, and move to catch my eyes. He wants an answer, something that has been sitting in the back of his mind for years, *is his mom still alive?*

But, there's something deep within my gut that stirs lightly, a good, warm feeling. So, I smile to the boy who has always been like a brother to me and nod my head, "Yes Will, she's okay, I know she is" I say with as much determination as I can. He stands, absorbing my words, when a smile finally creeps across his face, his eyes move back to the land.

"She's okay" he nods. And I nod my head slowly in response, truly hoping my gut is right.

The excitement builds on the deck as we creep closer and closer to the land. And I know my heart and turning stomach matches everybody else's as well. Looking about, it's the happiest I've seen the crew in a long time. But, many of them are in the same boat we have all been in, where, we haven't seen our families in years, so our hearts yearn to know how everyone is doing.

Finally, we approach the dock, and everyone's hands are on deck as we skillfully navigate the old vessel into her resting spot. Crew members are yelling across the deck as to make sure that nothing goes wrong, and that the ship will effortlessly move into the docks.

"EASY NOW!" Hopper's voice bellows as he stands at the front of the ship, giving orders. I stand with Will as we assist the long ropes that control the sails, we are to make sure they don't get knotted as the rope tumbles from above.

The Hawk begins to slow as the anchor skids across the bottom of the beach, the men above have the sails just right as the docks come into view. Then, after many commands and tired crew members, *The Hawk* bumps against the beach.

I'm pretty sure I hear the old ship sigh as she too, has finally returned home after her long and perilous journey. And, in unison, every crew member aboard sighs as well, as more cheers and hollering of joy comes from our deck.

Since *The Hawk* will be sitting for some months the process to get her ready to be moored takes a lot longer. Dawn just begins to set in as the final preparations are made, and now, every crewmate stands in their cleanest uniform, bags tossed across their backs, as we stand at attention, waiting for Hopper to speak.

We stand, anticipation rising in our chests, as Hopper paces in front of us. "You, have all been outstanding members of this ship, I couldn't ask for anyone better than all of you" he starts. "You all risked your lives numerous times and did something we had all been waiting to end, and this crew in particular rose well beyond the call, so that others could be safe".

"In a couple months time, we should have our next command, but for now...you have all earned time to rest, to see family, to make your next step in your life. And, I know not all of you will return, but, know that *The Hawk*, will take any of you back in a heartbeat" Hopper's strong voice carries across the ship.

"Thank you for your service and for fulfilling your duty, you will receive your shares in a week's time, for now....DISMISSED!" Hopper's commanding voice comes out, and we all move to salute him, and we are free.

Most of the crewmembers hurry off the ship, everyone anxious to get home. I, however, wait a moment, as I let people move past me.

"Come on El, we've got to go!" Will cries out to me, I turn towards him with a quick smile, "One minute, I'll meet you guys down there in a moment!" I throw a hand to my friends, as they shrug their

shoulders and head down the gangplank.

I maneuver my way through the crowd of men who are leaving the ship, and I hastily make my way towards Hopper, who stands off to the side, watching everyone leave.

When I approach him, his head drops slightly, his gaze following my path. I throw him a wicked smile, "Hopper", I say giving him a nod. "El" he gives me a slight look. I giggle, "What are you doing next?" I can't help but ask him, truly curious about what the next step in his life will be.

He shrugs his shoulder, "Going to head home, not far from here" he states. I nod slowly, "So, you'll be back to Captain then?" I throw him the question.

He lets out a long sigh, "Yes, the sea is where I belong, don't have a family to look after" he says simply. I can't help but feel my heart sink slightly in my chest, "Hopper", I whisper, but he only shakes his head at me.

"Kid, don't worry about me, I enjoy being out a sea, have a lot of interesting things happen", he says, but then his mouth quirks up, "Have to say though, this was the most interesting trip I've ever taken, never had a girl join my crew and deceive me for so long" he chuckles.

I feel my face light up at his remark, "Guess you'll be more careful then?" I tease him. He laughs again, "Hm, might not be as opposed to girls coming aboard, just need to make sure there's not another kid aboard who might fall head over heels in love with her though" he throws a wink my way.

I roll my eyes at his words, "Thank you, Hopper, for everything" I finally say to him, looking into his own deep blue eyes, that are as dark as the sea. His mouth tightens, "Thank you, kid, you've given me a lot more than you know" he says. And, at his words, I can't help but move towards him and throw my arms around his waist as I burrow my face into his chest, failing miserably at holding back my tears.

I feel Hopper wrap his arms around me too, hugging me into his

chest. We stand in silence, me mostly sniffing. And we stay there for awhile, however, I finally pull away and give him a watery smile.

He returns his own grin and then casts his head towards the gangplank, "Get going kid, I'll see you around okay?" he gives me a warm look. I nod eagerly as I move towards the edge of the ship, "You can't get rid of me that easily" I throw him another look as I wave, walking down the gangplank, in which he throws me a wave as well.

I turn my attention to the docks, where my friends stand waiting me. And although I feel sad about leaving Hopper, I know it's not the end of our journey together.

As I walk down the gangplank, I see my wonderful husband and friends gathered about talking idly, waiting for me. I can't help but stop for a moment on my way down and look at them together. My mind begins to drift back to the first day that we all came aboard this ship, many years ago. How much we've grown and changed startles me slightly.

However, seeing that we've grown, knowing that we have all survived the many journeys we have had together, melts my heart.

"El, you coming!?" Will's voice cuts through my reverie. I shake my head, smile down at our group, and continue to head down the gangplank to meet them.

"What were you doing?" Will asks curiously. I just shake my head, "Just, remembering our first time coming aboard the ship" I say with a shrug of my shoulder. Will laughs lightly, "Yeah, it feels like it's been forever, but also like it was yesterday too".

We all nod in agreement as we walk towards the shoreline. Our steps clamber together as we take swift steps on the old rickety dock. But, the moment we all hit the shoreline, we let out breaths of relief.

"Wow! To think, it's been more than seven years since we've been back home! It's crazy!" Dustin exclaims as his feet hit the sandy shore.

We all nod in agreement, as we all take a moment to take a look at our home, seeing what has changed, if anything. My eyes search the streets that I have walked a hundred times, and notice that the buildings are all but the same. However, the people walking the streets seem much more happier and chipper than before we left.

A smile stretches across my face, which doesn't go unnoticed by the others, "What are you smiling at?" Max shoves my shoulder lightly.

"It's just, everyone seems lighter, more happier than before" I breathe in relief. The others then observe the many people walking on the street.

"Yeah El, you're right, it seems to be...lighter" Dustin says while his eyes scan the streets.

And Dustin's right, there's a feeling of lightness that floats about the streets. There isn't a dark dread that looms over the city anymore, and it's actually very refreshing.

We make our way to the streets to join the hustle and bustle of everything around us, and this is where we know, we will all depart.

We turn to look at one another, not really sure what to do next. I let out a heavy sigh, "Will and I have to go and see if Joyce is okay, and if our house is even still standing", I say with a sad voice.

"I'd like to go see my mother, and...introduce Max to the family" Dustin says smiling brightly to the girl.

"Yeah, I need to see my family too, it's been too long" Lucas sighs.

"So...I guess, we go our separate ways for now, where does everyone live?" I ask, after being together for so long, we never really discussed where each of us live exactly.

Will throws down his pack, and opens it, pulling out a pad of paper and an old pencil. He hands us each a paper, "Here, everyone write down their house numbers, and streets, so that we all have them, and we'll arrange to meet soon, it's not like we live *too* far away from one another" he says with a small smile.

We each grab a piece of paper, and pass them around, making sure that each one has our addresses, to get ahold of one another.

Once we are done, we all stand, each with a paper, all exchanging looks. "Well, I guess this is goodbye for now", Mike says with a sorrow glance to the others.

All of our faces are pulled into tight frowns, each of us not wanting to say goodbye to the other. But, Dustin breaks the silence, "I don't want to say goodbye!" he cries out, as he throws his two arms around Max and Will who stand on either of his side, pulling them inwards, this in turn causes all of us to throw our arms around our closest companion, as we pull each other into a group hug.

Tears are slowly starting to come down each of our faces as we stand together. "We're not aloud...to not write, to not catch up here and there!" Lucas says through sniffles.

"Yes, and it's not like we won't see each other in a couple weeks at the awards banquet either" I croak out.

Everyone nods in return as we continue to hold onto one another. But, too soon, we begin to pull apart and move in separate directions. Max, Dustin and Lucas move and begin to head up the south street, while, Will, Mike and I stay in our spots, watching them leave.

"See you guys soon!" Max calls out, waving her hand frantically. "Bye guys!" Dustin shouts. "Don't forget us!" Lucas jokes, as they all wave goodbye.

The rest of us stand waving as well, silent tears falling down our faces. We watch them until they turn down the next street, leaving us apart for the first time in seven years.

I sigh, moving my hands to wipe the tears from my face, I turn to my husband and give him a sad smile, "Will you be off to see your parents then?"

And at my words, Mike startles slightly, but shakes his head quickly, "No, of course not, they don't even know we've made land, I'm sticking with you. We'll go to your house first, make sure Will's mom

is okay, and then we can make plans to visit my parents, okay?" he asks me gently while reaching out and taking my hands within his.

I shake my head at him, unbelieving his words, "You'll really come with us?" I ask quietly. Mike pulls me to him, and I crash against his chest, "Nothing, not even giant monsters, will keep us apart", he says to, placing a gentle kiss on my head.

I pull back and look up into his face, we smile genuinely at each other, and both move in to fill the space between us. We kiss each other gently for a moment until a voice breaks us apart, "Ugh, I don't know *if* I want Mike joining us, not if you two are going to be sucking faces the whole time" Will gives us a look of disgust.

Mike and I laugh, I pull away from my husband and loop an arm around Will's neck, pulling him close to me. "Don't worry Will, we'll behave" I state as he laughs at my antics.

"Thankfully we're not too far away", Will notes, as I pull away from him. I sigh, "Yeah, but it's still a long walk", I say with a heavy breath.

Both of the boys laugh at me, but, each of them move, swooping and arm through mine, as they begin to pull me along, "Come now El, you've got to show me the house you grew up in", Mike jokes as they all but drag me along until I match their wide gates.

"You'll love it! It's a large brick home, with a ton of rooms, and it sits right at the top of a hill overseeing the ocean!" my voice is excited as it is now my turn to pull the boys along.

"Well, I can't wait to see it!" Mike cheers, easily keeping up with me.

"And I can't wait to see mom", Will says softly, and I nod in agreement, as we make our way to the Brenner estate.

It doesn't take us too long to weave our way through town. All of us knowing the twists and turns that ensue within the crowded city. However, once we get to the outskirts of town, Mike sticks close to my side, our hands entwined together, as Will and I lead the way.

Will and I are chatting quickly about seeing the home once again. Will is obviously more excited to see his mom once again, anxiously awaiting to see if she is okay, and to tell her about all of our adventures.

An hour passes, and finally, as we reach the edge of the city, we follow a long dirt road up the well known path to Will and I.

My breath catches in my throat momentarily, knowing that this is the moment of truth as we make our way up the winding path.

Finally, the house comes into view. And my mouth drops open, it hasn't changed one bit, the bricks are still old and worn, and the flowers that Joyce usually plants on the edge of the home are in full bloom due to the warm summer air. However, it seems that there are more flowers than usual. I wonder in my mind that since my father died, if Joyce decided to plant more flowers.

Joyce had always begged my father to plant more flowers, because there was more than enough room, but, my father of course, liking to discourage anyone's joy promptly said 'no' each and every time.

Our pace slows slightly, as we take in the home, the place we haven't seen in years, as it stands, ready to take us back home. We silently approach the red painted door.

Neither Will or I make a move. "Uhm, are you guys going to knock?" Mike voice breaks between us. Will and I share a look with one another. Thoughts immediately begin to swim through my mind: is anyone even home? Was Joyce still alive? Maybe the house got sold...?

And now worry bubbles in my stomach, my chest growing tight at so many unanswered questions. Will and I both still do not move. I hear Mike sigh, and I watch as his long, gangly arm moves between us, and knocks swiftly three times, startling Will and I out of our thoughts.

"Mike!" I cry turning to look at him. He looks taken aback, "What, neither of you two were going to do it!" he raises his hands in defense. I sigh and turn back to the door. And immediately I hear

footsteps approaching from behind them.

My breath catches in my throat, my eyes wide, as the door creaks open, an stout man peaks his head through the crack. "Yes?" his voice is slow and uncertain.

Words are lost on my tongue, so I turn to Will to speak, but he seems as lost as I do. The gentleman opens the door a little wider, "May I ask why you are here? I don't have all day" he croans.

Mike steps in for us again, "We're looking for Joyce Byers" he says firmly, he places a hand on both Will and mine's shoulder. "This is her son, Will, and this is El, her father-", Mike goes to explain, but the man's mouth drops open, gasping, "Mr. William and Ms. Eleanor?" the man looks between the two of us.

I furrow my brow in confusion, honestly not knowing who this man is, never seeing this man in my life. "Yes but...who are you?" I finally find my voice. But the man, claps his hands together, "Oh, joy! Mrs. Byers will be ever so happy to see you again, come in, come in!" the man says excitedly as he ushers us into my childhood home.

Stepping past the threshold is like stepping through time. Nothing has really changed in the large home. My eyes evaluate my surroundings, taking everything in. The staircase is still worn, but shiny from the buffing Joyce used to do to make sure it stayed clean. The rugs are a little more frayed from use, and the pictures that cover the walls, are still stuck in their moment, staring back.

We remove our shoes and follow the man into the depths of the home. We follow down a very familiar path leading to the kitchen. We stop in front of the door, the man gestures to it, "She's right through there, baking as always" he says with a chipper tone.

Will and I look at each other once more, each taking a breath as we enter through the swinging door, and there, hunched over the brick oven, is Joyce.

I stop my movement, and Mike runs into me with an 'oomph', and he opens his mouth to speak, but I hold my hand up to stop him, I tilt my head towards Will, as he slowly approaches his mother.

She is muttering to herself as she pokes at something deep within the oven with the long wooden paddle. "Darn thing...never sits right..." she grumbles, having no clue we entered the kitchen.

Will slowly moves forward, but stops at the edge of the preparation table, his hand landing gently on the smooth surface. Joyce stands from the oven, pulling the paddle with her. She wipes her brow free from sweat and sighs, however, she still doesn't turn around.

But, Will opens his mouth to speak instead to grab her attention, "Mom?" he whispers to the air. And the second his voice enters the kitchen, Joyce freezes, clutching onto the paddle.

She doesn't move, Will does, however, maneuvering his way around the table, closer to his mother. "Mom?" he says again, a little louder this time, and at this Joyce finally begins to turn.

Her eyes widen, as they fall onto Will, his shoulders relax slightly as they finally see each other once again after seven years.

I watch in awe, as Joyce's mouth opens and shuts, her brain wanting to speak, but her mouth is not allowing her to. She moves slowly as she sets the paddle down on the table, moving gingerly towards Will.

Both of them are looking each other over in shock. They stop mere inches from each other. Joyce tentatively reaches her shaking hands out towards the much taller boy, not sure whether or not to touch him. But, finally she places a flour dusted hand on his cheek as she whispers "Will?" in a shaky voice.

Will nods, tears beginning to trail down his face, his mouth is split into a wide grin, "Yeah mom, it's me", he brings his hands up to touch her own. She gasps in surprise, as she begins to cry, throwing her arms around the boys frame while shouting, "Oh, Will!"

And Will returns the hug, throwing his arms around his mothers waist, holding her close. They are both crying as they sway against each other.

I feel my eyes begin to water too at the reunion, a smile breaks out on my face too.

They break apart slowly, still holding on to one another, as they snuffle and smile at one another. Joyce speaks first, "Will, I was never....I didn't...I thought..." she tries to say everything and anything in one saying, but the shock and happiness that resonates through her, stops her from saying anything.

"I know mom, it's been too long" is all Will says, as he just smiles his wonderful grin at his mother. Joyce cries out again, bringing him in for another heartfelt hug.

I feel Mike's hand reach out to connect with mine, and we interlace our fingers together, enjoying the reunion that unfolds in front of us.

The second hug doesn't last as long as the first, but when they pull away, Joyce can't help looking over Will in wonder. She reaches out and places with his hair, her smile is brilliant, "Look at your hair, it's so long! And look how much you've grown! You were so small when you left!" she amazes over her son, as Will blushes at her words.

"Yeah mom, we've grown a lot" he says in a soft voice. Joyce stops her observations of Will and freezes, "We?" she says, Will nods, and then looks over towards Mike and I. Finally, Joyce and mine's eyes find each other, I give her a brilliant smile, "Hi, Joyce" is all I say giving her a small wave with my free hand.

Joyce squeals in delight as she lets go of Will, and moves towards me, I step forward and meet her halfway, as we envelop each other in a warm hug.

Now the tears are flowing freely from my eyes once again as I relish the embrace from this wonderful woman.

Joyce pulls away, and now begins her assessment of me as well, "Oh, El, look at you, you've become such a beautiful young lady, you look just...just like your mother" she breathes in amazement. And my heart soars at her words.

"Thank you Joyce, you haven't changed one bit" I giggle at her, and the woman pshaws me. "Oh, I've grown into an older woman, worrying about the two children she sent out into the world", she jokes.

"We've got a lot to tell you" Will says coming to stand beside his mother. Joyce nods in agreement, "Yes! It's been too long, you've gotta tell me *everyth-*" her voice stops, when her eyes land on the last being in the kitchen.

I turn, and Mike a shy smile, he gives a small wave, approaching us, "Uh, hi, Mrs. Byers, I've heard a lot about you" he says, as Joyce reaches out to shake his hand.

"Oh, I'm sorry I didn't see you there, who are you?" she gives us a confused look. I giggle as I saunter up to the boy, I take his hand in mine, "This is Mike. He was a ship's boy with us on *The Hawk* and...he's my husband" I say with a brilliant grin on my face, tugging Mike closer.

Joyce's mouth widens in shock, unable to say anything, so Will speaks for her, "Told ya, we've got a lot to talk about".

After the shock set in, Joyce drags us excitedly into the living room. Mike and I settle on the old leather couch, while Will and Joyce take the creaking arm chairs on the side. The stout man who greeted us at the door comes in a few minutes later carrying a tray of tea and biscuits.

He sets them gently on the table between all of us. "Thank you, Robert" Joyce says with a grin. "Anything for you and the kids" he says with a smile and makes his way back down the hallway.

I give Joyce a curious look, "Who is he?" I can't help but ask, and Joyce chuckles, "That's Robert, or I call him Bob sometimes, I gave him a job after you kids left, needed a hand around the house", she says while shrugging her shoulders.

I nod in understanding as I reach forward for a cup of tea and a biscuit, I hand this to Mike, and then reach for my own, Will and Joyce do the same. We sit in silence for a moment, enjoying our tea together.

"I honestly can't believe you two are home" Joyce opens the conversation, looking between all of us. "I thought...that whatever

happened, maybe...maybe you settled elsewhere or..." her voice cuts out, and I have a pretty good idea of what the alternative might have been.

Will turns to his mother, "We were worried too, mom, we had no idea what happened to you after we left" he states sadly.

Joyce nods sadly at Will's words, "Yes, it wasn't easy after you kids left".

"I had to hide out for awhile, until daybreak, when the monsters finally dissipated", Joyce explains.

"What happened while we were gone?" Will asks curiously. Joyce sighs, "Well, the attacks became much more frequent, not just during the full moon's, and a lot of people were left hurt, and even dead, houses were destroyed too. It just went on and on, for many years" she says sorrowfully.

"Then, when the attacks became too frequent, each house had to build a safe shelter, and an alarm system was set up too, it helped for the most part, but, many people were left rebuilding their homes over and over again", she continues.

"This went on for quite some time, *years* actually", she stresses. "Then....one day a couple months ago, there was nothing. No looming fog, no shrill cries from the creatures, they were just...gone" she shakes her head.

"We all thought that something may have happened, or the monsters got bored or something, but then....then we got word that a fleet of King's ships had rallied together and destroyed the monsters island, and we haven't seen them since then. Peace finally washed over us, and we've been rebuilding little by little since then", she finishes looking at all of us.

I give a tight nod, "That was us...we were the ones who destroyed the island" I say just barely above a whisper. Joyce's head whips to me, "You! All of you!" she looks at us incredulously.

Mike chuckles beside me, "Actually, El's the one that blew up the

island, almost got herself blown up in the process" he says nudging my shoulder. I roll my eyes at him.

Joyce gives a tight smile, "I'm glad I didn't know any of this till now, I'm pretty sure if I had heard anything about this...I would have jumped on a ship myself and protect you all", she shakes her head.

We nod in return, "Yeah, we had a lot of adventures out there" I state, some of the more exciting memories popping into my mind.

Joyce turns her attention to me again, "Yes, I want to hear about everything, especially this young man here who...is your husband?!" she says a bit shocked.

I laugh at the woman, as I reach out and place a gentle hand on Mike's, "*That*, is definitely a story" I say with a broad smile on my face.

So, between Will, Mike and I we go on to tell Joyce about our adventures. About me having to hide my identity, our friends we made along the way, how Mike and I fell in love, and everything else in between.

We are just finishing up the last tale of our story when darkness begins to fall outside. Robert returns to the living room, lighting candles scattered about the room. He also brings us an assortment of cheese, meats and bread on a platter.

Mike, Will and I dig in to the wonderful food, having been stuck with mostly the same thing day in and day out for the last seven years. We're happy to have a change of pace.

We are chewing thoughtfully at our food, when Joyce lets out a long breath, "I just can't believe how much you two have grown, and how much has changed" she exclaims looking at all of us.

She studies us carefully before asking her next question, "So, what's your plan then, now that you are all able seaman, and *woman*" she asks.

At this, we all freeze, and look at each other with unsure looks. Will clears his throat, "Uh, we have really discussed next steps. You see,

next week they're having a celebration and honoring ceremony in London to honor all the ships and seaman who participated in the monster battle", he begins to explain.

"Then, *The Hawk*, is being moored for a few months, to give us a break for being a sea for so long" Will says with a shrug of his shoulders. Joyce nods, taking in this information.

"Well, if you kids want, you're more than welcome to stay here, I mean, El, this is still *your* home, you actually are the sole proprietor of the home" she states plainly.

I startle at her words, "Wait, how's that possible, I thought my father left me nothing" I shake my head in disbelief.

Joyce shakes her head with a smile, "Your mother put you on both of their will's before she passed, your name is on everything El, so, this home is yours" her smile is bright.

I blink a couple of times taking in this information, I couldn't honestly believe that I actually had something that was *mine*. "Wow...that's..." I try to say something, but my mouth refuses to work.

Joyce looks at me with a soft look, "El, I know it's a lot to take in, but yes, this is your home, and you're free to do whatever you want with it, I mean it won't be difficult for me to find-" she starts but I cut her off.

"No" my voice is quick and firm, "You've taken care of this house, you helped raise me here, I would *never* allow you to just leave. You and Will are more than welcome to live here" I state.

Joyce's eyes begin to water, "But El-", I hold up a hand to stop her, "No, I mean it Joyce, there are more than enough rooms here, besides, I think it would be weird to live here without you or Will in it" a soft smile grows on my face.

Joyce nods her head slowly, "Well, if that's what you want" she says with a shrug of her shoulders. And I nod with her, "Of course, and Mike?" I turn to my husband, who's full attention is on me.

"Yes, El?" he asks me with his sweet voice. "It sounds like we've found a home, I mean, if you're okay living out here" I say, my amber eyes meeting his dark one's. And at this he chuckles, "Wherever you go, I go, no questions asked".

I give him a wide grin, "It's settled then, this will be all of ours home" I state. Everyone nods in excited agreement.

Joyce begins to stand, patting her thighs as she does so, "Well, I'll get your beds together while you all get ready for bed, I'm sure you're all exhausted", her eyes examining our tired faces.

We all rise to our feet, as I pull Mike upstairs to my old bathroom and bedroom, while we bid Will a good night as he heads to his old room downstairs.

I wash my face, and rinse out my mouth, while Mike stands beside me at the basin, doing the exact same thing. A soft knock is heard at the door, while Joyce peaks in, "Your room is all set" she says with a bright smile.

I give her a soft look, "Thank you Joyce" I say earnestly. She gives a quick nod, "No worries, and Mike?" the boy in question looks at her quickly, "It's so great to meet you, and I'm so happy you and El found each other" her voice is earnest and true.

Mike relaxes beside me, "Thanks Mrs. Byers, it was great to meet you too!" But Joyce throws a hand at him, "You're family now, you call me Joyce", she says with a smile.

Mike nods at the woman as they all bid each other goodnight. I pull Mike behind me as I walk him towards my room. Stepping into the room, nothing has changed either, I can't help but smile at seeing how everything is the same.

"Wow, this is not what I pictured your room to look like" Mike says behind me as he looks at my light pink wallpaper, my rows of dolls and the frilliness that is my room.

I turn towards him, "What, I was eleven and I just so happened to like all of this" I gesture to the room around me, giving him a look. He

chuckles as he steps towards me and pulls me close to him. And I melt into his embrace.

He places a gentle kiss on my forehead, as we just stand there holding one another. Mike exhales a long breath, "I can't believe we finally made it here, to being in a home, together".

I hum in agreement, "I know, I thought we would never get here". I settle my head on his chest, as he strokes my back slowly.

I break away from him and pull him towards my bed, which, I'm silently thankful it is bigger than the twin I had had when I was a young child, it would fit Mike and I perfectly.

I let go of his hand, as we both undress, and climb into the warm sheets, Mike pulls me close and I settle my head on his chest. I look around the dark room, lightly illuminated by the candle that flickers on the table beside me.

"We can change it, make it ours" I say into the night. "Hm?" Mike says nuzzling into me more.

"I mean, this is the room I had when I was a kid, I want to make it ours" I look over the pinkness of the room and cringe slightly. I feel Mike chuckle, "We can do whatever you want" a yawn escaping through his mouth.

I huff, "No, I want it to be *ours*, not just mine" I stress. And Mike laughs again, "Yes, that's fine El, we can do that another time, but right now, I'm just enjoying being cuddled up with my wife, in a bed, together" his words are soft.

I let myself relax and move to hover over him slightly, "You know" I say with a coy voice, "We haven't christened this bed yet, which will be our bed".

Mike perks up at this, "No, no we haven't", his voice is low and husky, as he moves his hand to run it up my bare back.

I bend down to lock my lips with his, which quickly grows into a heated embrace. And soon enough, we are wrapped tightly around each other, safe in each other's arms as we make love under the roof

of our new home.

Well...what did you guys think!? I really hope you enjoyed the reunion and it was satisfactory enough! Next chapter will be meeting Mike's family! So stay tuned.

As always, REVIEWS, are always welcome! Love hearing from my amazing readers!

Till next time!

41. Meeting the Parents

I know, another long wait between chapters, but I was desperately working on the latest chapter for Watching Her Fall In Love, which I know many of you are reading as well. So, I firstly have to thank all of you for your wonderful reviews for this story and that one as well. All of the kind thoughts and remarks made my heart so full! You are all truly amazing readers!

I'm sure you want me to get on with the story, so here we go!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of View:

The next couple of days consist of settling in and rearranging my old home. Joyce insists that we change whatever we want, but honestly, I can see she has already changed a good majority of the home. The old dark wallpaper had been replaced with a warmer color, and the depressing paintings that used to hang about had been exchanged for paintings of flowers and warm scenes.

Of course, Joyce kept up my family's paintings and photos, but she has added some of Will's baby pictures as well, which I find enjoyable to see. So, I don't touch any part of the house except for my room.

Mike continually insists that he's fine with the pink wallpaper and girly dolls everywhere. But, after being out at sea for so long, the blinding pink walls no longer catch my eye, and I'd much rather change it out.

So, the next couple of days consist of ripping down the old wallpaper, and replacing it with a much more calming color. We had gone to the local market to look around, and my eyes caught a calming blue, like the ocean. And even Mike couldn't deny that he liked it more than the pink.

Most of my dolls ended up in the attic, along with much of my childhood toys. I pack them away gently, I admire each doll lightly

stroking their hair and silently promising them that they will come out the day she and Mike have children of their own.

After a couple of days, the room comes together, and Mike and I stand in the doorway, admiring the new wallpaper, furniture and paintings that now adorn our walls.

Mike's arm wraps around me and pulls me close, he kisses my head, "You happy?" he chuckles lightly. I slap his chest knowing he's still picking on me, "Yes, are you?" I quirk up to him, and he gives me a radiant smile in return, "As long as I'm with you, the happiest" he breathes.

And with that remark, I can't help but stand on my tiptoes, wrapping my arms around his neck and pulling him into a deep kiss, which he warmly returns.

In my mind I can't believe how lucky I am. To be here, back in my childhood home, with a husband and people to call family. No longer is it a cage I had felt trapped in for years, but a place where mine and Mike's family will grow.

Of course, once the room is set, and we are settled in, Mike and I lay in our bed, cuddled up to one another. He's gently stroking my shoulder, and there's a heavy silence between us, and I can tell there's something he wants to ask me.

So, I turn to him, "Mike, what's wrong?" I chirp at him, and he turns his head to look at me, his eyes are wide with surprise at my question, "Wh-what, nothing's wrong" he tries to play off, his eyes not meeting mine.

I sigh heavily burying my head into his chest. I pull my head up again to look at his face, "Mike, I've known you long enough to know when something's troubling you, just tell me".

He lets out a long sigh, turning his head to look up at the ceiling, "I guess you do know me, can't hide anything from you".

I giggle at his words, "Nope, that's what you get for marrying your

best friend", I tease.

I feel his low chuckle in his chest, he breathes in, "I was just thinking...we should probably...go see my parents" his voice sounds unsure.

I sit up slightly looking down at him, "Why are you so nervous? I told you I wanted to meet them".

Mike shrugs, "It's just....my parents...they're different. They have high expectations for me, and I'm sure they'll be surprised I spent seven years at sea, and I somehow came home with a wife?" he looks at me with an amused look.

I see where he is coming from, I guess that would be weird for *anyone* to go through, I was happy enough Joyce hadn't asked many questions, and just accepted mine and Mike's marriage. But, I had never met Mike's family, and from the sounds of it, his father was fairly strict.

Mike moves and turns so that we are both laying on our sides staring at one another. He reaches out gently and tucks a stray hair behind my ear. And a worry falls over me. It must be on my face, because Mike is now frowning.

"What's wrong" he hums to me. I can't help but laugh, "I guess you know me well too" I joke, which makes him smile, "I do", he whispers.

It's my turn to sigh, "Do you...do you think they'll like me?" my fear now out in the open. Mike rises slightly on his arm, staring at me with wide eyes. "El, of *course* they'll love you, my mom especially, she's dreamed of the day her dorky son would find such a beautiful and amazing woman".

I feel my face flush at his words. "You think so?" my eyes turn up to him, he shakes his head, "You have nothing to worry about...although....my dad might just be an ass because that's who he is, but my mom and both my sisters will love you, I promise", he whispers and I can feel the sincerity in his words.

I nod my head, "Okay, then why don't we go tomorrow" I suggest. Mike nods his head, "Yeah, I think that's a good idea" he smiles as he lowers himself back down next to me.

We stare at each other, just taking each of our beings in, thinking about everything that has come and what is still yet to happen, as we drift off to sleep.

Although I attempted to sleep last night, my mind kept stirring me awake. I couldn't shake the fears of meeting Mike's parents, my deepest worries was the fact that they may not like me, and I hated that feeling.

So, I tossed and turned throughout the night, attempting to get as much sleep as my brain would allow.

The sun began to stream into the window and my sleepy eyes were heavy with exhaustion. I turn to curl into Mike wanting to get a little more sleep before we get ready for the day.

Thankfully, I am able to get another two hours of sleep before Mike begins to stir beside me. I'm also thankful that he is not a morning person and prefers to sleep in most days.

"Morning" his voice is still heavy with sleep. I giggle, "Morning" I say in return as I snuggle closer to his warmth.

"Mmm, we'll have to get up soon" he mutters. I nod my head into his chest, "Yeah we will" I admit, my fear still heavy in my mind.

And we eventually do roll out of our warm bed and get dressed for the day. A couple days ago, while out in the market, Joyce had pulled me to a local clothing shop stating that all of my old clothes probably wouldn't fit anymore, and new dresses were needed.

It felt weird trying on new dresses after becoming so accustomed to wearing pants and shirts for the last seven years. Now, I found myself being tied up into a corset, by Mike no less, and a heavy dress is draped over me.

Although it flows lightly at the bottom, the top is tight and confining

and I secretly hate it. "I don't understand why you have to wear this", Mike mutters as he pulls at the strings and laces me up.

I sigh heavily, "I was just asking myself the same question" I say between breathes. And I have to admit Mike's steady work at tying the corset and dress up surprises me. And asking how he is *so* good at this, he blushes stating that his sister would ask him all the time to tie her up since their mother had been busy with their new baby sister, and he learned accordingly.

I chuckle at him after he finishes, turning his attention back to me, giving me a look. "You should consider yourself lucky your husband knows how to do this" he teases, and I smile up to him, "I am, and I should be even more thankful that he knows how to get it off quickly as well" I quirk an eyebrow up to him.

I watch in amusement as his face goes from surprised to lustful. "Careful now, El, I just got you all tied up, I'd like to not have to untie and retie again in such a short amount of time".

We laugh together at our flirting, as Mike turns to a nearby chair, where his black uniform coat lays. He tugs it from the chair and casts it around his back as he shrugs it on.

I stand back and admire my handsome husband for a moment while he buttons the golden buttons that decorate his coat. I watch his hands nimbly fasten the buttons, and when he finishes he raises his head to find me staring. His lips tug at the corner, "What are you looking at?" he teases as he fusses with the collar I know he hates.

I shake my head at him as I approach him, reaching up to help him, "Oh, just admiring how handsome my husband looks in his uniform" I say as I flatten the collar and then reach for the ascot that tucks in just right.

Mike allows me to finish his uniform, "There, all done!" I chirp at him, laying my hands on his chest. He brings his hands up, lacing them with mine, our eyes meet, "You look radiant by the way" his voice is low.

A blush creeps its way onto my cheek, I duck my head, "You're just

saying that", but at my words Mike tugs at my hands so that our eyes lock, he gives me a look, "No, El, you are by far, the most beautiful, radiant, gorgeous, woman I've ever met" his words are slow and meaningful and I can't help but melt.

"Mike" I whisper as he brings his head down to mine, as our lips meet into a sweet kiss. I can feel my eyes watering at his words, but I try to hold them back, not wanting my makeup to run.

We pull back a moment later, small smiles dancing across our faces. "Well, we better get going" Mike sighs, as he takes one final look into the mirror as he plays with his unruly hair.

I can't help but chuckle. Ever since they had all grown their hair out, all those years ago, Mike's hair seemed to be untameable, and he refused to cut it. So, tying it back in a small ponytail and letting his loose curls bounce around his head was the only way he could really wear it 'formal'. But, for some reason, she loved seeing him this way, and it made her heart melt.

After he finishes fussing with his hair, he takes a step back and looks at me, "Alright, that's as good as it's going to get, shall we?" he asks while offering me his arm. I giggle at his gentleman side as I lace my arm with his, "We shall" I say as we walk out of our room together.

"Oh, don't you two look so grown up!" Joyce comments as we walk down the staircase together. I laugh, "We *are* adults though, Joyce" I remind the woman, who throws her hands at me, "You will *always* be children to me, no matter what your age".

We get to the final stair as Bob opens the front door for us, "Your carriage is all set, you two" he nods his head outside where a local carriage had been hailed for Mike and I.

We both throw a 'thank you' to the man as we walk outside. Mike opens the carriage door for me, as I, not so gracefully, maneuver myself into the carriage. Once settled I can see that Mike and Will are both trying to hold back their laughter.

I roll my eyes at them and point a finger at my childhood friend, "You try wearing a corset and stepping up that high!" I throw at him, and

Will's laughter comes tumbling out as Mike gets into the carriage as well.

"We'll see you two later, have a good time!" Joyce cries as we wave to her, and the carriage begins to move away from our home.

I look over to Mike who gives me a steady look, "Don't worry, it'll be fine" he tries to reassure me. I only nod at his words, not really knowing what to say, as we ride in silence to his parents home.

"We're almost there" Mike's voice brings me back to reality as I have zoned out, watching the town pass by the carriage windows. I turn my attention to Mike who is looking kind of excited and I can't help but smile.

However, I feel a sharp twinge in my stomach, as a wave of nausea comes over me. I hold my stomach tight, and Mike is immediately on me, "El, are you okay?" his voice is full of concern as he takes hold of my free hand.

I nod tightly, "Yes, yes, just this corset...it's tight as all, and the carriage is making my stomach roll" I wince as another wave hits me. Mike moves so that he is sitting beside me as he rubs my shoulder.

"If you're not feeling right, we can turn back", he begins to suggest, but I shake my head, "No...no definitely not, it's just I'm not used to wearing this and being in a carriage", I try to reiterate.

"But, you've just come off a ship", he says, and I roll my eyes, "A bouncing, wobbly carriage is a little different than a ship at sea" I bite back. And I immediately look to Mike, his face a bit stunned, I sigh, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to snap, just....nervous" I apologize, and Mike pulls me close to him.

"No, don't apologize I know this is a lot for you, I shouldn't be so immediately concerned" he tries to comfort me, and I sigh once again, still not believing how I got so lucky in love.

Our faces turn to one another, our eyes meeting, as we lean in for a kiss. But, instead we are thrown the opposite direction as the carriage

comes to an abrupt halt. "We've arrived to the Wheeler residence!" the chauffeur cries from the outside of the carriage.

Both Mike and I look at each other with exasperated looks as the carriage door opens before us, the driver holding it so it wouldn't swing shut on us. We both clamber out of the carriage, and before I know it, we are standing in front of Mike's home, I swallow hard.

I had known Mike had come from *some* money, as did she, but it still surprised her that the worn brick house that was on the outskirts of town was his.

Mike's arm looped around mine, and it broke me of my trance of looking at the large structure, "Ready?" he whispers into my ear, and taking in a deep breath, I nod.

So, Mike tugs me along as we walk up the concrete steps, my breath held within my chest. He moves ahead of me slightly and knocks on the large wooden door, as I wait in anticipation for the door to open.

There are quick footsteps that are heard approaching the door, and to my surprise it is whipped open and there stands a young, blonde haired girl, giving a questioning look out the door.

Her eyes fall onto Mike, "Hey, Holly", is all he says, and the little girl's eyes light up in excitement as she squeals and launches herself into Mike's arms.

Mike laughs deeply as he catches and then hugs the little girl to his chest as he swings her about. "Mikey!" the girl cries as she clings to Mike, "Ah, Holly, it's so good to see you!" Mike cries as he pulls her back to look at her.

I watch in awe as Holly reaches forward and touches Mike's face, "You've changed" she says with a bright smile, Mike grins as well as he sets the girl back on the top step, ruffling her golden hair, "Well, you have too, Holls, look how big you are!" he exclaims dramatically and she giggles again.

"Holly, who's there?!" a voice carries through the house as another set of footsteps approaches the doorway. An older woman with dark,

curly brown hair makes her way forward, "How many times have I told you not to answer the door, that's what-" and she stops immediately once her eyes are on Mike.

I silently watch as Mike looks up to the woman with a bright smile, "Hi, mom", is all he says, as the woman's eyes begin to tear, as she cries out, "Michael!", and she rushes into his arms, as he holds onto her tightly. And she can see that Mike is crying as well.

"Oh, my boy, it's been too long!" his mother's cries are muffled into his jacket. "I know, I know, it definitely has been", Mike returns as they pull away from each other, however, Mike's mother stands close to him, "Look at how tall you are, and how handsome you've become!" she coos over her now grown son.

She can see that Mike is flushing at her words, and my heart swells at their encounter. I've seen to be forgotten, which I honestly don't mind, but I'm pulled out of that safety, when his little sister cranes her around Mike and her bright blue eyes catch mine.

She tilts her head at me, and gives me a curious look, "Who are you?" her small voice breaks between Mike and his mother, both of whom turn their heads to look at me. Mike, with a bright, winning smile, and his mother's is a look of awe.

Mike moves towards me, as he wraps his arm around my waist, "Mom, Holly, this is El, I'd love to introduce you to her" he says, his voice quivering with excitement.

And I watch as both Holly and Mike's mother's eyes light up, "Oh, yes, come in, come in you two!", his mother gestures for us to come into the home. Mike's eyes meet mine and he lifts his eyebrows up, I give him a shy smile as he leads me into the home.

Once we cross through the doorway, and the door is shut behind us, Mike's mother is on us instantly. "Oh, Mike, we've got so much to ask you, and you've got so much to tell. But-" she stops and turns to me, "I'd really like to know who this beautiful young woman is" she gives me a once over, and I flush. "My name is Karen by the way" she holds out her hand in which I take in a small shake, "It's a pleasure to meet you" my proper way of speaking returns, as she flashes me a smile.

Mike chuckles beside me, "That I can definitely do, but I'd rather do it with Nancy and father here as well".

"Oh, yes! Charles!" Karen calls, and a man dressed in all black slacks comes out of a nearby room. "Yes, Mrs. Wheeler?" he nods to her.

"Please fetch Nancy from her room, and Mr. Wheeler from his study, and please have Marge bring out a plate of food and tea if you would?" she asks politely, and the man bows to her, "Will do", and he is off.

Karen then turns her attention back to Mike and I, clapping her hands together, "Come, we'll go into the living room while we wait for the other two to join us" she states as she leads us down a hallway and into a large open room.

My eyes take in everything, all the old antiques and paintings that surround the room. Along with the beautiful arrangements of fresh flowers that brighten the room.

Mike leads me over to the nearby couch and we sit upon it, while Karen sits on the other couch, Holly taking up a spare chair.

And no sooner do we sit, do we hear footsteps approaching down the hall. I turn my head to the side to see another woman entering the room, her face looking exasperated as she looks around, until her eyes find Mike's.

"Mike!" the girl cries out, and I feel Mike move, as he stands to meet the older girl in the middle of the room, as they embrace in a tight hug.

"Oh, we thought you'd abandoned us or something!" the girl cries. Mike chuckles, "No, just...very busy out at sea".

They pull apart as the girl looks him over, "Look at how tall you've gotten! You're not so much a *little* brother anymore!" she teases him as Mike rolls his eyes. "Exactly, so you no longer need to treat me as such", he nudges her.

"Well, it does seem you have grown, Michael", a male's voice trickles into the room, and I turn to see an older man approaching them, I

can only guess that this is Mike's father.

At his appearance, Mike's stature becomes a bit straighter, the man approaches Mike and holds out a hand, in which Mike shakes. It's not hard to tell that this is the strain that has always held between them that Mike has talked about.

"Father" Mike nods to the man, as they shake. "It's good to see you home, I see you've returned a decorated seaman" the man gestures to Mike's lapels where he holds a couple pins that states his accomplishments.

Mike nods tightly, "Yes, been very successful", and his father nods, a pregnant silence falling over the room.

Thankfully, Karen breaks it, "Ted, Nancy, come sit! Marge is bringing out a tray of food and tea, and...Michael's brought a friend as well" and as she says this, she gestures to me, and I can feel my face redden as all eyes are on me now.

I try to avoid their eye contact, but Nancy's face of surprise is hard to look away from, she approaches me quickly, "Oh, a *lady* friend, Mike, when did this happen?" she gives him a sideways glance, I look to Mike who looks like he wants to melt away in embarrassment. "Nancy" he seethes through his teeth, but she moves to stand before me, so I stand as well, she holds out her hand, "I'm Nancy, Mike's older sister", I smile as I grip her hand, "I'm Eleanor, or El, as most people call me" I try not to sound foolish.

Nancy grins brightly at me though as she moves and takes a seat on another empty chair, while Mike's father approaches me, he gives me a slight bow, and I curtsy in return, "Theodore Wheeler, Michael's father" he nods. "Pleasure to meet you" I return, as he moves to sit next to his wife, Mike turning to sit with me.

Another silence falls in the air, and it's awkward in taste, something I do not like. Nancy doesn't seem to like it either, so she 'tsks', and looks to us, "Okay, we aren't going to sit all day here waiting to explain Mike, tell us *everything*, and I think you ought to start with this woman sitting next to you" she lifts her head to me, smiling.

Mike shifts in his seat and clears his throat, casting a look at me, "Well, there's *a lot*, actually, but I think-" and as he says this, Mike grabs my left hand with his and holds them out so that everyone can see our matching rings, which entitles a gasp from everyone.

I turn my head up slowly, my light brown eyes meeting his dark, knowing ones. His smile can't get any bigger as he stares at me. "El, isn't just a *lady* friend I brought home, El...she's my wife" he says breathlessly and I can't help but return his charismatic smile.

"Your wife!?" Karen squeals as she stands to move to us, grabbing each of our hands to examine our rings. Nancy and Holly are right behind her, as our hands are tugged to be examined.

"How...when...what?" his mother tries to spit out looking between us with a bright smile, which I hope is a good thing.

Mike waves them off, "Hold on, sit down you guys, it's a long story" and the girls in his life back off and sit back down, although at the very edge of their seats, wanting to hear every little detail.

El peaks out of the corner of her eye to see Ted, who is sitting quietly, playing with his thumbs. El's not sure what to take of this, but Mike isn't reacting to it, so she feels herself pulling away from him as well, her attention back on the girls.

Mike turns to me and shrugs, "Well, it all started the day I left home, on *The Hawk*, I met El there, although, when I met her she was, *Elliot*, hiding her identity as a girl" he quirks a look at me.

And, the next couple of hours pass by as both Mike and I take turns recounting our adventures. We answer questions here and there that are thrown out as well. Many of them are geared towards me and how I was able to keep my identity as a girl hidden for so long. The girls seem to be enthralled by my stories and quick wit throughout our voyage.

They awed over the moment Mike and I professed our love to one another and how I revealed who I was. We told them about the fight against the monsters, and even our wedding.

The girls were all silently crying over that fact. "I can't believe my little boy is all married now! And I didn't even get to see it!" she says as she pats at her eyes.

Mike frowns at this, "Yeah, we hated that we didn't have you all there, but...the moment was just right" he says as he looks at me again, squeezing my hand.

This elicits a chuckle from Nancy, "Mhm, and I'm sure it had nothing to do with what happens *after* you're married" her voice is suggestive, and I can feel my face flare and I'm sure Mike's does the same.

"Nancy!" Mike barks at her and she laughs. As Karen swats at her, "Leave them be" she says as she turns back to us, "Well, go on then, finish your story".

I nod as I then recount our trip to Ireland, and how just a couple of days ago we came back ashore. Karen 'tsks' at us, "You waited four whole days to come and see us?" she looks at Mike with wide eyes.

He holds his hands up in defense, "I'm sorry, but El and Will needed to make sure his mom was okay, it's not like we're going anywhere soon, and we're not that far away either" he argues as his mother rolls her eyes.

"Well, as long as you two are safe and sound now, but-" and at this she turns towards me, "I'd love to get to know my new daughter-in-law, and I'd love to know how she managed to rope my son in" she says jokingly, which I do laugh to.

"Mom" Mike groans in embarrassment. "Oh, Mike we're just teasing" and Mike shakes his head as he turns to his father, who has remained silent the whole time. I feel his hand squeeze mine.

"So, father" he starts and the man shifts his eyes to Mike, "Are you excited or anything, you haven't said a word" I can hear his voice is laced with annoyance.

I watch as Ted sits up straighter in his chair as he leans his arms onto his knees, he lets out a long breath, "Well, I guess you've gotten everything figured out now, son, did what you needed to" he shrugs.

"What's that supposed to mean" Mike's voice is tight. I look between the two men. His father stands and stretches, "I just mean, you made a man of yourself, got a woman you found hiding on some ship-", but his words are cut off by Mike bolting to his feet, "Don't you *dare* say anything like that about my wife!" he points his finger to his father, whose eyes narrow at Mike's pointed finger.

"You're just pissed I didn't marry someone *you* approved of. I did exactly what you wanted by joining the Navy, and I was supposed to come back and follow your orders afterwards, not even taking into account as to what *I* want in life" Mike's voice is taunted.

Ted shakes his head at Mike, "You don't get it Michael, Wheeler's marry-", "WHAT!? Woman who are chosen for them!? And that's real great to say right in front of *your* wife!" he barks at the man as he approaches him.

"I honestly don't care about the '*Wheeler*' name, father, I care...I care that I found someone who loves me, and I love her for everything she's worth!" he now stands a head taller than his father as he glowers down on him.

Ted takes a step back, "Now, son-" he tries raising his hands, but Mike doesn't relent, "NO! You don't get a word in this, this-" and he gestures to me and him, "Is *my* life, I have done extraordinarily well, and you're just pissed you didn't get it, so, I'd appreciate it if you actually acted happy for me, and not be so miserable to everyone else!" he barks.

Mike's eyes are pinned right onto his father's, "I don't care if you're apart of my life, my wife's and our future children's, that's your choice father, and I don't really care" he seethes through his teeth.

"I've got mom, Nancy, Holly, and now El, if you refuse to be apart of it, then...so be it" he finishes as he backs off slightly.

My gaze shifts between the two men, and then to the girls who are staring, shocked, mouths wide open.

Ted huffs out a breath shaking his head, "Fine son, it's your life, do what you may" he holds up his hands in defeat as he walks off, Mike

watching every movement until he is gone.

I let out the breath I was holding as Mike returns to the couch, sitting beside me, as his hand actively searches out mine and I take it in comfort. He lets out a long, frustrated breath.

"I'm sorry you had to see that" he mutters to the ground he is staring at. Karen lets out a sympathetic breath, "Oh, Mike, you know your father, but...I'm just glad you spoke your mind, looks like a lot *has* changed about you", and Mike looks up at her words, a soft smile adorning the older woman's face as she looks at her son.

"Well, I went through years of listening to his 'disappointment' talk, I'm ready to move on from it" he shrugs his shoulders.

I squeeze his hand in return, as Mike turns his head, his dark eyes meeting mine, we give each other soft smiles.

"El, dear, you pay no mind to Ted, once he gets to know you, he'll change his ways, and if not, well...then he's got me to answer to", Karen says with a quirk of her eyebrow and I give her a smile and nod in return.

Karen then claps her hands together, rising to her feet, "No use sitting around, it's almost dinner time, why don't you two join us?"

Mike nods his head, "That sounds great mom, thanks". And with that Mike stands from the couch, offering his hand to me as he pulls me up to stand beside him.

We move to walk, however, Holly comes running up to Mike and tugs on his free arm, "Mikey, you've got to come see my room, I've got *lots* of new toys you haven't seen yet!" the younger girl pulls at her brother's arm.

He turns and gives me a sympathetic look, "I uh-" he fumbles over his words not really sure what to say. His sister jumps in, grabbing onto my free arm, "Dinner won't be for a little bit anyways, El, why don't you join me in the kitchen for a bit, I'd love to hear more about you", she flashes me a grin.

Both Mike and I give each other a look, "Yes, kids why don't you go

off, I've got to make sure the table is set anyways, and maybe have a word with your father" she growls the last part.

I sigh, turning to Mike, "It's okay Mike, go with Holly, I'll meet you for dinner", I throw him a wink, which he grins at.

"Alright, but don't tell her *everything* about our relationship, which is what I *know* she is dying to ask you about" he jokes throwing his older sister a look, she giggles at him.

"Don't you worry little brother, it's just some girl talk is all" she teases him, in which Mike rolls his eyes at.

"Come on, Mikey!" Holly tugs impatiently at his arm, so we begin to separate, "I'll see you at dinner!" he throws over his shoulder as Holly drags him off, I give him a small wave as they disappear upstairs.

I feel a pull at my side, my eyes meet Nancy's excited ones, "Come on, we've got a lot to talk about" she giggles as she pulls me away, and even though I can feel the nervousness swelling within my stomach, there's something about Nancy that draws me to her.

Nancy tugs me along to the kitchen, where a pot of stew is brewing over a hot fire. The smell is inviting as I take in the scent. She seats me down on a nearby stool, as she moves seamlessly about the kitchen grabbing a loaf of bread, and a chunk of cheese. She places it between us, as she stands on the other side of the table.

I simply sit and watch as she cuts into the bread and cheese, handing me a piece, I sit and nibble on it, as she cuts herself some as well.

We sit in an awkward silence for a moment, before she speaks. "So, how did you fall in love with someone like my brother?" she cuts right to the chase, causing me to stop chewing and looking at her.

She's giving me a tilted look, and I laugh lightly, "Well, there's just so much too him, that...well it was hard to not fall for him" I shrug.

Nancy laughs, "It's just...he was so awkward as a child, and so quiet too, mom and I always feared he'd never marry. But, then he goes off on a little adventure and returns with a wife!" she says exasperated, as if not believing her own words.

I giggle at the girl, "He's also sweet, kind, caring..." I drift off thinking of all the many things Mike is and I smile to myself, "He's also very handsome too, he....he became my best friend, and I couldn't imagine life without him" I say earnestly.

Nancy awes at my statement, "Mike's too lucky for his own good, I mean from what you've told us, you're not some fancy, stuck up girl, but you're someone who can hold your own, which I think is exactly what Mike needs".

I nod at her statement as I finish off my cheese, I smile, "That was really good" I state honestly, never really having such a creamy cheese. Nancy perks at this as she moves to a nearby cabinet, "It's a special blend, my father adores it, and if you liked that, then you'll have to try this!" she says as she returns to the table, placing a covered dish on the table.

I give it a curious look as she begins to remove the cover. And the moment she does, a foul odor hits my nose, and I'm immediately nauseous, my stomach whirls.

"This is Limburger, mom picked it up the other day, doesn't smell the greatest but the taste is-" and Nancy stops short as she looks into my face, which I'm pretty sure is as white as a ghost.

"El, you okay?" she asks me hesitantly, my reaction is to nod, but the bile that begins to rise from my stomach and into my throat tells me otherwise.

Nancy's reaction is quick as she moves to the far wall of the kitchen where a lone bucket lies, she just barely makes it to me before I heave all of the contents of my stomach into the opening.

She holds it steady for me, as I grasp at the edges, my stomach constricting at each upheaval. I can barely catch my breath before each heave into the bucket.

"Shhh, it's okay El", Nancy tries to comfort me, as she rubs my back as my violent vomiting ceases somewhat.

I spit into the bucket unceremoniously, wishing the sour taste to go

away, because it's only making me feel sicker.

"Ughh" I groan, my voice echoing into the object, my energy drained from the retching. I slowly pull my head up, the world spinning slightly as I do so.

"Take it easy, it's okay", Nancy's voice is now behind me as she continues to rub soothing circles in the center of my back.

I allow myself to hover over the bucket for a little bit, making sure that I don't vomit again. After a couple of minutes Nancy moves away from me and fiddles around in the kitchen. A moment later she gently removes the bucket from my waist and sets it to the side.

She moves gently as she pats at my mouth with a cool, damp cloth, removing any vomit from my mouth. She then holds up a mug of water to me, "Rinse out your mouth, spit it into the bucket, then take slow sips".

I hesitate as I gingerly bring the mug of water up to my lips and sip the cool water, swishing it gently within my mouth and then turning to spit the vile into the bucket. I then take a couple small sips as Nancy instructed.

I rest my head onto the table and groan, "Ugh, I haven't been that sick since we first boarded *The Hawk*", I admit to the girl who strokes my back lightly.

"Really?" the older girl asks, and I nod, "Yeah, I mean...I've been feeling a little nauseous since returning home...I think it's just been the anticipation of everything I shrug", however, at my words, Nancy's hands halt.

I peek out and look at her, her face is contorted slightly, "What?" I ask her, now feeling a little concerned as I sit up.

She turns her head ever so slightly to me, a smile creeps onto her face, as she tilts her head, "How long has it been?" she asks. I shrug my shoulders, "I told you, since we were close to shore, here and there I've gotten motion sickness and-" but Nancy holds up a hand to stop me, I frown at her.

"No...I mean, how long has it been...since you're last cycle", her eyebrow quirks up. It takes me a moment to realize what she's talking about, since, even though Max and I are both girls, we had been surrounded by men, and they don't necessarily like to hear about our 'womanly times'.

I think about it a bit, I shrug my shoulders again. Honestly, we're so busy on the ship and getting things ready, I hardly pay attention to the *actual* time it comes, I just tend to take care of it when it begins, the stomach cramps always being a tell tale sign that it's coming soon.

But, as I begin to think, it's usually every couple of weeks that the damn thing creeps up on me, and I always sigh heavily when I start. However, as I wrack my brain, I begin to realize it *has* been awhile since I had gotten my last cycle. And it dawns on me, it was right before we arrived to Ireland, meaning it had been almost two months since I last bled.

My eyes widen and I look at Nancy, she's giving me a look, "I'm assuming...since you and my brother *are* married that you guys have..." and she moves her hands back and forth. I shake myself out of my mind, "Uh..yeah...we have" I say not looking at her, a blush filling my once white face.

She giggles, but then reaches forward and takes my hands in hers, I look up at her as she smiles, "Well, you *do* know what can result from that, right?" she gives me a questioning look.

And it's right there, the answer as it hangs in the air between us, and now, it's all making sense. The nausea, the stomach cramps, and...no bleeding.

At the thought, I feel like I'm going to be sick again, and I hold onto Nancy tighter. "Woah, El, are you okay?" she holds me steady.

I open my mouth to speak but nothing comes out, my brain really trying to process this new sense of information.

So, Nancy speaks for me, she bends her head lightly, trying to meet my eyes, "So, El, is it possible? Are you...pregnant?"

And the word hits me so hard that I gasp in surprise, not really sure what to say. "I uh...I think...I might be" I admit to the older girl, who then jumps up from her seat and squeals, "Oh my gosh! I'm going to be an aunt, El, this is so amazing!" she then pulls me into a hug.

My arms slowly wrap around her, still frozen in shock.

Pregnant. The word revolves around my head again and again.

Nancy pulls away and her face falls slightly when she looks at me, "El, is everything okay?" she asks sincerely.

I don't react, because I don't know how to, or how I should. I feel a gentle hand under my chin, Nancy bends to look me straight in the eye, "Hey, it's okay to be nervous El, but, this is a good thing, right?"

Her words sit in my head for a bit, *is this what we wanted?* Rings through my head. Mike and I knew exactly what could happen if we partook in sleeping together.

My mind is actually surprised for a second, for Mike and I had been married for quite a few months already, and I had just assumed it might take awhile before I got pregnant. Not that we were planning, but, now it's a reality.

I shake my head from my thoughts and give Nancy a soft look, "Yes, it's great, I'm just...taken aback is all" I let out a nervous laugh, which makes Nancy smile.

"You and Mike will be wonderful parents, and from the look on your face, he obviously didn't know because, it's obvious *you* didn't" she jokes.

I huff, "Hey, I've never been pregnant before, and I'm not really showing so..." I trail off, now looking down at my stomach, which doesn't look any bigger than it had.

I gently move to stand at my feet, Nancy watching my movements as I place a delicate hand on my stomach, as I stroke it slightly, "A baby", I whisper.

"A baby" Nancy whispers back, as our eyes meet and we both smile at

one another.

"You've got to tell Mike" Nancy says shaking her head, and my eyes widen, "I can't" escape from my mouth before I can stop them.

At this, Nancy lets out a loud laugh, "Well, I think he's going to find out, one way or another" she points at my stomach, reminding me that even though there is no evidence of a baby now, there will be soon.

I roll my eyes, "I just meant...I don't know" I sigh in defeat sitting again.

Nancy pats my shoulders, "Just wait till after dinner, when you two are alone", she suggests and I nod slowly, "Yeah, I think that sounds good" I agree with the girl.

She sits once again, our grins meeting each other, as we sit together talking lightly about everything and anything until supper is ready.

Dinner goes without show. And Ted even begrudgingly sat down and made small talk with everyone. However, Mike's twitching leg told me he was on edge the whole time.

As I sat there, I couldn't help but go back and forth within my mind of whether I wanted the dinner to keep dragging out or get over quicker, so that I could either avoid or tell Mike about the baby.

Each time I looked over at him, I couldn't help but think of what our child would actually look like. Would he have Mike's dark curly hair? Would it be a boy or a girl? Whose dark eyes would they take? All of those questions kept swimming in and out of my mind, and each one made my excitement grow as I absentmindedly patted my stomach throughout supper.

And when it finally came to an end, we bid everyone a good-night, Nancy giving me a look that said, "*you better tell him*". As Mike led me up to the third floor, where his old room sat.

He seemed excited, wanting to show me his childhood. "You're room was nothing compared to mine, wait till you see it" he jokes along the

way until we reach his door.

He stops and gives me a look before he creaks open the door. Mike steps through first, pulling me along, as the glow from the moon and the light of the candles we each carried cast a small glow around us.

Mike lets go of my hand as he moves about, lighting the candles that have sat in the dark for the years he was absent, the light now giving a soft glow around them.

I then take this moment to look around Mike's old room. It's been well kept, and I assume his mother has kept up with the dusting while he was gone.

The ceilings are much higher in his room, his walls adorned with regal, dark blue wallpaper. Old toys of tin army men, wooden ships and blocks are scattered about. While a handful of stuffed animals sit on his shelves.

I'm just about done taking everything in when Mike approaches me, "Well, what do you think?" he chuckles.

I take his hand in mine, "It's adorable, definitely you, that's for sure" I grin at him as he ducks his head. "Heh, I can't believe they kept it the same, would have thought dad might have just gotten rid of everything" he says as his dark eyes move about the room.

My eyes catch the small balcony that is attached to his room, I drag Mike behind me as I approach it, and open the door as we step out.

A cool wind whips about us, our clothes and hair flowing with it. I take in a deep breath of the nearby ocean, and sigh in contentment, "It's beautiful here" I state looking out at the ocean.

Mike hums in agreement beside me as he pulls me close. His hand resting on my stomach, which brings back a matter that needs to be discussed with him.

I let out a long breath as I turn to look up at Mike, and my breath catches as his hair whips in the light wind, he turns to look at me and smiles, "What are you looking at?" he says coyly as he turns my body

to press against his.

He swoops to my neck and places gentle kisses there. I melt into the moment and allow him to. I can feel his need growing, and mine too, if I'm being honest. But, there's a nagging thought in the back of my mind that if I don't tell him soon, I probably never will.

So, I push back on his shoulders lightly, "Mike", my voice comes out more breathy than I mean it to, and his eyes catch mine, "What's wrong, are you okay?" he asks genuinely concerned.

I smile, shaking my head up at him, "I'm fine Mike, but...before we get too carried away I...I have to tell you something" my eyes turn to search his. I watch as his eyes widen in concern, "Is everything okay, are we okay, is this about my dad, I'll-" he tries to continue to ramble, but I lean forward on my tiptoes and place a kiss onto his lips, silencing him.

He moves gently into it, as do I. But, before it goes too far, I pull away. I give him a gentle smile, I raise my hand to his chest, "Mike, everything's okay, it's more...it's more to do with...both of us" I try to explain.

Mike's face scrunches more in concern, "Are we okay then?" he asks worriedly, and I sigh, "Yes, Mike everything's fine between us, it's....a little more than that".

He sighs, "Okay, I'm confused now, you're going to have to make this a little more clear" he chuckles and I laugh too. "I know, it's just..hard" I shrug, as Mike rolls his eyes, placing a hand over mine that lay on his chest, "El, no matter what you have to tell me, whatever it is, I promise everything will be okay".

"You promise?" I turn my eyes up to him, and he gives me that warm look that melts my heart each time, "I promise" he says in return as he nods to me to continue.

It's now or never, echoes through my mind, so I take in a deep breath, and close my eyes.

When I open them again, I stare into Mike's deep brown eyes and get

lost, my next words flowing through me effortlessly, "Mike....I'm pregnant", and I watch as those dark eyes widen, and his mouth drops open in shock.

Yep, I'm going to be a little mean and leave it there for now because I want to get this chapter out....and cliffhangers are fun as well.

But, I can't thank you all enough again for the wonderful reviews, kudos and everything else you have offered to me in the last couple of weeks, it's so greatly appreciated, and I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, because I know MANY have been waiting for it.

Actually, I've been dropping subtle hints in the last couple of chapters that she was pregnant, did anyone catch them? Anyways, kudos to those who saw them, because they were pretty small, but I'm getting close to the end, for REAL this time, I'm thinking two more chapters and definitely an epilogue, so we will see!

Thank you all again, and as always REVIEW! I love them!

42. The Big Reveal

Again, as always I'm blown away by all of your lovely reviews and comments on this story! Also, thank you to those who wished my husband and I a happy honeymoon! We had a great time! It was even cool to see that Stranger Things 3 got a release date of July 4th! Still too far away, but hey, at least there's a date, and a countdown will commence!

So, as you guys have been patiently awaiting, here's the next chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack.

Mike's POV:

The frustration that lies beneath my skin itches furiously as I continue to replay the events of the evening over and over again in my mind.

Holly has dragged me up to her room to play before dinner, and I can feel the tension within my body struggle to get under control, as I try to ease my clenched teeth as I play with Holly.

I attempt to listen to her babble of play as I try to immerse myself into the imaginary world she is creating. But, all that I can think of are the words that my father spit out, and how I shouldn't have expected any less from him.

"Mikey, are you okay?" Holly's light voice barely makes it to my ears, as I shake my head to bring my attention back to her. I must have been deep in thought for her to have picked up on my absent mind.

"Huh?" I flick my dark up eyes to the curious look that Holly is giving me. I force a smile, "Yeah, yeah, I'm fine Hol, sorry", I fiddle with the new wooden horse she thrustured into my hands the second I walked into her room.

It's skillfully crafted, and the mane is neatly braided. "Mikey?!" Holly's voice is a bit more forceful this time, and I shake my head

once again, I sigh, "I'm sorry Holly, just... a lot on my mind is all", I move to place the wooden horse on her dresser, and then sit down at the chair adjacent to it.

Holly approaches me with a saddened look, "Mikey, don't worry about what father said, you know he's always been that way".

I let out a rough laugh, "Yeah, he only cares about how *dignified* our family is, he doesn't give two cares about what makes us happy or not".

My words are tight and harsh, and I hear Holly sigh beside me, "I know, father has been even worse since you left", she states.

I turn my head ever so slightly to her, "What do you mean?" I quip to the younger girl. She shrugs her shoulders slowly, "I just mean, he's been more absent, I think....I think deep down he *does* care about us, but doesn't know how to express it".

I scoff at her words, "Father has always been that way to me, just because I was his only male child, doesn't mean he has the right to treat me like I'm some...some..." but my words fail me as I have risen to my feet in my outburst.

My heart beats wildly against my chest, as I grip onto Holly's dresser, my knuckles turning white at the force.

"Mikey" Holly's voice is sweet, as she reaches out and tenderly touches my shoulder, and at the contact I relax slightly. My shoulders slumping as I let out a long breath.

I turn to face my youngest sister and give her a small smile, "I'm sorry Hol, I just wish father got it is all".

Holly returns the small smile, "I know Mikey, it's just how father is, at least you have us, and El too" her smile gets even bigger at the mention of El's name.

I nod firmly, "You're right, everyone else is happy for us, I shouldn't care about what father thinks".

Holly giggles, "Well, now that, that's settled, will you play with me?"

and at this she looks up at me with her bright blue eyes, and I melt instantly, "Of course" I chuckle as she once again thrusts the wooden horse into my hands, "Come on, let's play!" she shouts as she rushes around the room with her own doll within her hands.

I shake my head with a light smile as I take off after the girl, my mind more at ease.

Holly's giggles carry on for awhile as I attempt to play through her thought up play time of her doll being needed to be rescued by some knight.

She's just finishing up her story when we here a shout from below, "Mike, Holly, come down please and wash for dinner!", mom's unmistakable voice carries up.

"Aww" Holly whines as she slumps. I chuckle to the girl as I stand and reach for her small hands, "Come on, we can play some more tomorrow", I try to reason with her and she huffs in return, as she takes my hand as we go downstairs to dinner.

Upon entering the dining room, I see no sign of my father, and I mentally sigh in relief. Instead, the door leading to the kitchen opens, and I spot Nancy and El talking in hushed tones as they enter into the dining room.

I feel my whole body soften as my gaze rest's itself upon El, and I realize that I'm the luckiest guy in the world to have such a beautiful, amazing and strong women in my life.

As if she can feel my stare on her, she flicks her amber eyes up at me and gives me a shy, but hesitant look. A slight feeling of uncertainty wracks through me, and I make my way towards her.

"Hey, everything okay?" I whisper to her. She whips her head to me as if I had just discovered her darkest secret as she places a quick smile on her face, "No, no everything's fine, just...tired from helping Nancy is all" her voice quivers slightly.

But then she gives me her warm, gentle look, takes her small hand

into mine and leads me to the table, and I know I have nothing to worry about.

My mother sits at one end of the table, while Nancy and Holly take up one side, and El and I the other. Our hands continue to stay intertwined underneath the table until it's time to begin to fill our plates with food.

El and I both marvel at the food, for we had grown accustomed to the everyday either slab of meat or random soup that held leftovers along with stale biscuits.

Now, we both fill our mouths with the delectable meal that El and Nancy had whipped up together, and my tongue sings in harmony at the flavor.

I lean over to her and whisper, "You're a really good cook". I watch as her face blushes slightly, as she ducks her head, shaking it, "Thank your sister, she did most of the work".

I give her leg a tight squeeze under the table and return to the meal, as my mom and sisters continue polite conversation between El and I.

However, part way through the meal, my father decides to make his presence known, as he approaches the table. I grip my fork a bit tighter than usual as he walks in, smiling tightly, as if the event that happened earlier never occurred.

The table sits in silence as father fills his plate as if he has missed nothing, and tucks into the food.

Now, it's my turn to feel El's hand gently squeezing my thigh beneath the table, halting the jaunting movement of my leg that I had been unknowingly bouncing. I turn and give her a slight look, and she gives me a soft smile.

And I try to relax throughout the rest of the meal, as my mother attempts to get the conversation flowing once again. My father even joins in here and there with some of his own comments, that I desperately try to ignore.

Once dinner has been completed, we bid goodnight to everyone in

the room, as I anxiously take El's hand and lead her upstairs towards my room.

I have to admit that I'm a little excited to show her my childhood room.

I'm bouncing on the balls of my feet as I brace myself in front of my door, smiling widely, and El is giving me a mischievous look, "You're room was nothing compared to mine, wait till you see it" I joke before I creak open the door. I step through first, pulling El along, as the glow from the moon and the light of the candles we each carried cast a small glow.

I let go of El's hand as I move about the room, knowing where each candle sat in the dark for the years I had been absent, the light now giving a soft glow around us.

I turn as I observe El, who turns this way and that, a soft smile gracing her features as she takes in my room. My heart beats wildly in my chest, never in a million years believing I would have an *actual* girl, let alone my *wife* looking around room.

I approach El slowly after it seems as if she has gazed upon every corner of my old room, "Well, what do you think?" I chuckle.

She takes my hand in hers, "It's adorable, definitely you, that's for sure" she grins at me as I duck my head in embarrassment of her choice of words.

I decide to look around the room as well, "Heh, I can't believe they kept it the same, would have thought dad might have just gotten rid of everything" I say as my dark eyes move about the room.

I don't get to take in much more before I feel a tug on my hand as I turn to see that El is dragging us towards probably my favorite place in the whole house, my balcony.

She whips open the door and glides out to the balcony, a cool wind from the ocean whips around us, causing our clothes and hair to flow along with it.

And I watch in silence as El's now much longer and curlier hair flows

around her in such a beautiful way, I cannot look away.

"It's beautiful here", her voice barely breaks my trance on her, and I can't help but merely hum in return as I reach out and grab her to me.

I rest my hand delicately on her stomach, and rest my head on her shoulder, breathing in her scent, something I will never get used to.

Just as I am enjoying the moment of just us being together, I hear El let out a long breath, as she turns and looks at me. Her amber eyes widen as my hair whips across my face, and I can't help but smile, "What are you looking at?" I tease her, as I turn her around to face me, pressing our bodies closer together.

She opens her mouth to speak, but I don't let her as I swoop down to her very inviting neck and begin to place gentle kisses there. Instantly, I feel her melt into my embrace as I continue my onslaught of love onto her. I can feel the need growing within the pit of my stomach, as I begin to think, *we christened her bed, now we must do mine*. My internal beast growls at the thought as I continue to pull her closer to me.

But, before I can continue, I feel her push away slightly on my shoulder as she whispers "Mike", and I freeze slightly, our eyes meeting, and worry beginning to fill me once again, "What's wrong, are you okay?" I ask, concerned that something is really bothering her.

She smiles, shaking her head up at me, "I'm fine Mike, but...before we get too carried away I...I have to tell you something" her eyes turn to search mine. And the dread fills me faster than ever before as my mouth begins to spin out of control, "Is everything okay, are we okay, is this about my dad, I'll-" I try to continue to ramble, but, instead, El leans forward ever so slightly and places a gentle kiss upon my mouth, silencing any more words.

Now, it's my turn to melt into her embrace, as our lips move in our knowing dance. And just when I think we're about to pick up where we left off, El pulls away again giving me a gentle smile once again, as she places a hand on my chest, "Mike, everything's okay, it's

more...it's more to do with...both of us".

Confusion twirls through me, I honestly don't know what she's trying to say or convey, "Are we okay then?" I ask more worriedly than I meant. El sighs, "Yes, Mike everything's fine between us, it's....a little more than that".

I sigh, "Okay, I'm confused now, you're going to have to make this a little more clear" I chuckle, truly not knowing where she is trying to go with this conversation, and she begins to laugh too. "I know, it's just..hard" she shrugs, and at this I roll my eyes, and I reach up my own hand, placing it delicately over hers that lays on my chest, "El, no matter what you have to tell me, whatever it is, I promise everything will be okay".

"You promise?" she turns her eyes up to me, and I give her a warm look, "I promise" I say in return as I nod to her to continue.

I hold my breath tightly in my chest as I watch El close her eyes and take in a deep breath as well, when she opens them again, she stares into my eyes before she whispers, "Mike....I'm pregnant", and I feel my mouth open in shock.

El's words hit my ears as if it were a cannon exploding right next to my ears. I shake my head slightly, unsure if I heard her correctly, but, my brain is going a million miles a minute so all I'm able to choke out is "What?"

She seems taken aback slightly, but she sighs, taking another step towards me, her soft smile growing bigger, "Mike, I'm pregnant, I'm carrying our child" she all but whispers, and I *know* I've heard her correctly this time.

My brain is still processing her words, and I'm unable to speak. My eyes only continue to search El's face, and I watch as her face continues to grow more worried by the second. And, the working part of my brain realizes I need to speak and say something to her.

And just as she begins to duck her head, my arms reach out and grab onto her shoulders, and her amber eyes immediately whip to connect

with mine. And, without saying anything, I pull her into a long hug, just holding her to me.

The moment she buries her head into my chest I feel her heave a huge sigh, as she begins to giggle lightly.

I still hold onto her as I bend my head down and place a slow kiss on her head, she turns at the contact and our eyes meet again. Hers glimmer lightly with tears as her bright smile turns up on her face, which I return.

"I...I was afraid...you..." she shakes her head, and I only squeeze her tighter, "Sorry, my brain wasn't working right" I chuckle.

Her eyes continue to search my face, "So...you're happy?", and my mouth drops open again, "Happy?! Of course I'm happy!", I shout jubilee as a wide grin dances across my face.

El giggles as I stare wildly at her, "This...this is what we wanted, and...it's almost perfect timing now that we aren't sailing" I breath.

She nods at this, "Yes, it's perfect" she sighs, as she moves back into my embrace. I hold onto her for a moment as we breath each other in and just take in this new moment together.

But then, I pull away slightly and begin to bend down, I cast a quick look back at El and she's giving me a peculiar look.

I stop right at her stomach, and I notice now, that, there is a slight bulge that wasn't there before. Since, El's stomach, as I remember, had always been extremely flat.

But now, I see the light bump and I caress it with each of my hands. And, I honestly can't believe it. I know I won't be able to feel the baby for awhile, but, its existence is right there, El's stomach the only thing separating us.

I let out a shaky breath, "Hey...little one, it's...it's your daddy", and a smile creeps onto my face. I feel El's hands come and rest on my shoulder, "I...I mean we can't wait to meet you".

I caress El's stomach one more time, before I stand, I watch as El's

shimmering eyes follow me as I do so.

"You're going to be a wonderful mother" I whisper to her, and at this a tear finally escapes from her eye as it trickles down her cheek. "You think so?" she whispers through her tears.

I give her an earnest look, "El, of course, you've got so much to give our child", and the words flow effortlessly from my mouth, as my smile grows bigger, "Our child" I whisper in wonder, and El chuckles, "Our child" she mimics back as we both laugh together.

Once we calm down enough, I bend my head down to her and she immediately picks up what I'm about to do, but before our lips meet, El's breath is on my mouth, "You're going to be a wonderful father too", and our eyes catch each other once again, before our mouths meld together, holding onto each other tightly.

We break away slowly, still in each others arms, I can't help but nuzzle her lightly before saying, "So, we christened your bed, I think we should celebrate and do the same to mine" I say gently to her.

El laughs as she shoves at my chest, "You are something else Mr. Wheeler". I swoop down and press a searing kiss to her mouth, pulling away quickly as El chases after me, "I only say it because I know you're thinking it too" I say hotly.

El's eyes quip up in challenge, "Then why don't you bring me to your bed then?" and without a moment hesitation, I bend down and sweep El up into my arms as she squeals lightly holding onto my shoulders for dear life.

I place another long, deep kiss onto her mouth as I bring her gently to the bed, "As you wish, my beautiful wife". And we then spend the next hour tangled up together, happy within our own bliss.

El's Point of View

A calling, muffled voice arouses me from my deep sleep. I stir within the comfort of Mike's arms and the warm bed sheets. My eyes blink blearily as I attempt to decide if I want to become fully awake or not.

My eyes flutter shut again, but then a persistent knocking comes from the other side of the room. "Mike, El, are you two up? Breakfast is just about done", El deduces that it's Mike's mom's voice that travels through the door.

I sigh heavily, looking over to my sleeping husband, and seeing that he is nowhere to being awake just yet. I roll my eyes, as I myself roll out of bed. I search the floor for my discarded shift that Mike unceremoniously tore from my body late last night.

I eventually find the clothing, pull it over my naked body, and hug it tightly around me as I pad to the wooden door.

Arriving at the door, I undo the latch, and pull it open, to see a startled looking Karen. "Oh, good morning El!", she chirps as she realizes I had been the one opening the door.

I give her a tired smile, "Good morning Karen, we're just getting up, but if you give me a couple minutes I'll drag Mike out of bed" I chuckle.

Karen nods her head, "Good luck with that sweetheart, I know he is troublesome to get up in the morning".

I can't help but nod in agreement at her statement, "Oh yes, he's very stubborn" I roll my eyes to my sleeping husband, but then turn back to Karen who has begun to make her way towards the staircase.

"I'll be sure to keep everything warm for you two", she waves as she makes her way back down the staircase.

I move to shut Mike's bedroom door behind me, sighing in tiredness as I slowly approach our bed. I slump my body heavily onto Mike's and he grunts in return, "Come on Mike, time to get up", I mutter into his face as my fingers trace through his wild locks.

"Hmmm" he groans, "Tired...don't wanna" he mutters back. I sigh heavily as I lift myself onto his bed, straddling his waist, "You asked for it then" I sigh as I reach down to his side and nimbly move my fingers against his sensitive skin.

Within moments he jolts awake as his hands attempt to stop my

onslaught of tickling. "El!" he half laughs, half yells to me as his whole body shakes, "Please...s-s-stop!" he giggles.

I hold steady above him, "Promise to get up?" I say down to him. "Yes..just please!" he tries again, and I give him another quick stroke of my fingers before I stop, resting my hands to the side. Watching Mike's bare chest rise and fall as he tries to catch his breath.

"Are you awake now?" I tease to him, and he chuckles lowly, "You're evil" he groans and at this I flip myself back over the side of the bed to stand beside the bed, watching him sit half way up.

His dark eyes are narrowed at me, "Must you do that *every* morning?" he groans as he rubs at his eyes. I laugh, shrugging my shoulders, "If you'd get up when I ask, then no, I probably wouldn't".

He huffs at my words as he begins his stretching and yawning that usually follows his wake up call. I roll my eyes at him once again as I move across the room, gathering my clothing and walking towards the mirror.

I stop, looking at the full length mirror as I adjust my shift, and I pause to turn sideways, my eyes settling on my stomach.

I move my hands slowly as I tuck the loose material up and under my stomach, and I notice the very small bump that is beginning to grow there. My eyebrows turn up in surprise, not noticing before that my body was getting ready to change.

I'm staring at myself so intently I don't notice a pair of arms wrap around me, so I jump lightly. "You look beautiful" Mike's soft voice rings through my ears as he settles his head upon my shoulder, his hands falling on top of mine around my stomach.

I sigh in contentment, "I'm going to be fat" I state plainly. He chuckles, "That doesn't matter, you'll always look beautiful to me". I roll my eyes at his flattery, pulling away slightly to continue my task of getting dressed.

"You have to say that, you're my husband" I purr to him as I pull my dress from yesterday on turning to Mike, silently asking him to tie it

up.

He laughs again as his fingers move knowingly along my back, tying each knot perfectly. "I don't *have* to say anything, I chose to comment on your beauty, because it's true" he hums and bends down just so to kiss the base of my neck.

I can't help but smile at his words as he finishes up my dress, "Alright, you're all set" he says, dropping his hands, as he turns to collect his own clothing and getting dressed himself.

I hum in contentment as I sit at his dresser and find a lone brush, as I move it through my own wild curls, wanting to tame them.

"Alright, are you ready for breakfast?" Mike's voice sounds tired as he finishes buttoning his jacket.

I finish brushing my hair, and turn my head from side to side admiring my work. Mike's face appears beside my reflection, smiling. "See, beautiful" he whispers as he places a quick peck on my cheek, which makes me flush as he readies his hand, helping me stand.

When he pulls me to my feet, we smile at each other brightly, taking each other in. When, something suddenly strikes me, "Your parents...are we going to tell them?!" my voice is filled with anxiety.

Mike's mouth turns downwards, pondering my words, "Oh...I guess I hadn't really thought on that" he says slowly.

"I mean...it's still early, the only reason Nancy figured it out-" I start, until Mike whips his full attention to me, "Nancy knows!?"

I startle slightly, "Uh, yeah, I got sick in the kitchen and...she was the one who actually brought the possibility of a pregnancy to my attention" I confess.

Mike pulls back, and nods slowly, "Okay, if she knows, I guess that's okay, but...my dad" he growls slightly.

I sigh as I place my hands on his chest, "Mike, whatever your dad has to say doesn't mean anything to me, but your mom deserves to know".

He lets out a long breath, "Yeah, okay, we can always tell her, and she will tell my father down the road" he huffs.

I lean up and give him a quick peck on the lips, "Good, now...let's go share the news!" I try to remain as chipper as possible, Mike only nodding as he finishes buttoning up his shirt.

We trudge downstairs, hand in hand, I can feel that Mike's is slippery with sweat and I can see the anticipation in his face, that he is quite nervous.

Even though I feel a tight knot in my stomach, I have a high hope that things will turn out better than Mike seems to be predicting them to be.

"Ah, here they are, we've been waiting for you!" Karen's bright voice rings through the dining room as we step through the door, Nancy and Holly turn and give us smiles as we walk through.

"Morning, mom" Mike chirps to his mother as he guides me over to the empty seats across from Nancy and Holly, as he pulls out my chair for me, allowing me to sit.

He tucks in next to me, clearing his throat as he turns to look at his mother who has sat herself at the head of the table. He looks around nervously, "Mom, where's dad?" he asks with a curious look upon his face.

Karen sighs while rolling her eyes, "Oh, you know your father dear, had an early work thing he couldn't turn away from", she says while fluffing out her napkin and settling it onto her lap.

My eyes flicker over to Mike, and I see that some color has returned to his face, and his body relaxes, and I follow in turn. I reach under the table and squeeze his hand, knowing that telling his mother without his father here is going to be much easier on him.

I give him a look and he only smiles as he reaches for a couple strips of crispy bacon and some eggs as we begin to tuck into the meal.

The talk is light and Holly does the most of it. I've settled with a

simple piece of toast with a rich jam, and a small helping of eggs.

Since realizing my pregnancy, I've noticed that my stomach is in more knots than usual, and the smell of any food is much more potent than before. And sadly, it makes my stomach turn.

I was hoping that no one would notice my meager eating, however, of course, Karen picks up on it once we are halfway through the breakfast, my toast barely touched.

"El, is everything okay, you've barely touched anything?" she asks in concern. I open my mouth to speak, but she continues, "If there is anything else that can be made, I wouldn't mind-", but I quickly shake my head at her, cutting her off, "No, no, Karen, it's fine, just...I'm not that hungry" I state weakly as I poke at my side of eggs.

Her face turns into a frown, which I hate to see, so I turn to look at Nancy, whose eyes are glued to mine, she lifts her eyebrows and then flicks her eyes over to Mike, silently asking me if I've told him yet.

My face flushes and I nod, trying to contain my smile, in which it seems she tries to do the same with. She then catches my eyes again and nods towards her mother.

I shrug my shoulders, but then her eyes go wide and she nods eagerly. I drop my shoulders and give her an exasperated look. She in turn rolls her eyes and then looks to Mike, and I get the picture.

I sigh, and move my leg closest to Mike and nudge him. He turns, his mouth moving as he chews, he gives me a questioning look.

I move my hand so it rests on my stomach, and then I give a subtle nod towards his mother, who has been quiet for a bit now, and I give him a look.

He swallows hard, looking between me, my stomach and his mother. He then gives me a silent look that says, "Now?", in which I hastily nod into.

He lets out a long breath, sets his fork onto his plate, and pats his mouth with his napkin. He then turns slowly to face his mother.

"Mom?" he quips, his voice quiet. She turns up from her meal, "Yes, Michael?" she gives him an earnest look.

"Uhm.." he starts, and I know he's nervous, so I reach underneath the table once again, intertwining our hands and giving him a helpful squeeze.

He returns the gesture, as he takes in a deep breath, "Uhm, there's actually a...reason why El's not eating much" he starts, and I squeeze his hand once again to continue.

She turns to look at me with concern, "Are you alright m'dear? If you're sick-" but before she finishes Mike holds up a hand to have her stop, "She's fine mom, uhm...she's just been nauseous lately", he tries to explain.

"You see...uhm...we...uh" and I realize that in this moment, he's probably never going to be able to spit it out, so I squeeze his hand extra tightly, which makes him turn to look at me. I give him a bright smile, as I turn my attention to his mother, "Karen, what Mike's trying to say is...well...I'm pregnant", the words finally leave my mouth, and Karen freezes.

The table is silent, but it is quickly disrupted by a delighted squeal that comes from across the table as Holly pushes back from her seat and quickly makes her way over to me. She throws herself into my arms as she giggles, "I'm going to be an auntie!" she squeals in delight.

I only laugh as I return her hug, "Yes, Holly, you're going to be an aunt". She moves away slightly and then places her head on my stomach, "Hello little baby, I'm going to be your aunt Holly" she then rubs my stomach affectionately and I turn to look at Mike, who rolls his eyes at his younger sister.

"Holly, El might not like that", he grumbles, but the younger girl flicks her narrowed eyes up to Mike, "If El doesn't like it then she can say so" she argues back, and to this I shrug at Mike, but then turn my eyes to a still silent Karen.

Mike turns his head as well, "Mom, is everything okay?" he asks

suddenly, and this seems to shake Karen out of her silent state.

We all watch in silence as Karen lifts her head, looks at both Mike and I, and then...she finally smiles.

Karen stands from her seat and moves towards Mike, who stands as well, and Karen envelopes him into a deep hug. "Oh, I'm sorry, I was just surprised, but, this is so exciting!" she cries as she pulls away from Mike, and makes a beeline straight for me.

A wave of relief washes over me, as I move to stand, and the woman all put squishes me into her arms.

I hear her gasp in a breath, as she pulls back slightly, our eyes meet, and I can see that hers a sparkling with unshed tears, as a watery smile graces her face, it makes me want to cry as well for all the joy.

"El" she whispers looking at me, "This is such a blessing" she breathes, and I let out a short breath of relief.

"Yes, we're both very excited too" I grin ear to ear. And Nancy is soon by our side, she pulls me slightly out of Karen's embrace as she envelopes me into a hug as well, "We're all excited for you and Mike, being an aunt is going to be so much fun!" she cheers as she pulls away.

I catch a look from Mike from out of the corner of my eye, and he is smiling brilliantly at me, I can tell by his posture that he's happy for how things have turned out, and I have to agree I feel relieved as well.

"There will be so much planning to do!" Karen says quickly as she clasps her hands together. Now, all of our attention falls onto her.

"We'll have to redo Mike's room, and get the right stuff for the baby and-" she continues to spur along, and Mike and I look at each other with slight apprehension. Karen has yet to realize we are going to be living in the home left to me by my mother.

I quirk and eyebrow up to Mike, who steps in shakily. "Mom" he says as he places a gentle hand on her shoulder. "Yes?" she quips stopping her spewing, and turning to look at Mike.

He once again looks unsure, but he knows he has to break this news to his mom, and not me. I watch as he fidgets slightly, taking in a deep breath, "We uhm...we've already got a home, El's mother left her their family home, and...it's the perfect size for us, so..." he trails off, stopping to gauge his mother's reaction.

Her face falls slightly, "You mean, an hour travels away?" she questions. Mike shrugs his shoulders, "Yeah, but, it's in the countryside, right on the ledge of the ocean, and...El and I want to start out our family there" he explains.

Karen's shoulders fall slightly as she fiddles with her dress, but then she gives a small half smile, "Yes, of course, I know you two will want to be on your own, but!" she points a finger into the air, "That doesn't mean we won't redo your old room into a nursery, *and*, you two better visit often with that grandchild of mine!" she says with a bright smile.

I'm pretty sure Mike and I both relax after her statement and agree that once the baby is born, we will definitely visit as frequently as possible.

But, another look crosses Mike's face as he turns to his mother, "What about dad?" comes out of his mouth quickly, and his mother looks at him with a surprised look.

However, it quickly disappears as she pshaws at Mike, "You let me handle your father, we don't need another repeat of last night" she rolls her eyes in dismay. And at this Mike relaxes once again, as he joins me by my side.

"Well, let's retire to the living room shall we? We've got *a lot* of exciting things to discuss!" Karen chirps as we all look at one another, however, follow her into the living room.

After an afternoon of discussing the many things that come with expecting a baby, and my brain is about to explode from all of things I try to tuck away into the back of my mind so that I don't forget, a knock comes from the front door.

Nancy leaves to answer it, only to return shortly after to announce that Mike and mine's carriage is ready to bring us home.

There is a shout of "Noooo!" from Holly as she holds onto both Mike and I, not wanting us to leave. But, after some persuasion and promises that they will be able to come and see us soon, Holly agrees to let us leave.

Both Mike and I give tearful goodbyes to Karen, Nancy and Holly. "You let me know if you need anything, dear", Karen says as she holds onto my hand as I get into the carriage.

"I will, I know I'll have a lot of questions down the road" I give the woman a soft smile, which she returns.

"And Mike, you better take care of this wonderful young girl, and your expecting child!" she gives him a tight look. Mike rolls his eyes in earnest, "Yes mom, don't worry I'll take good care of them", he promises as he enters the carriage and closes the door.

"Goodbye dears, we will see you soon!" Karen cries as our driver whips to the horses, and they begin to move.

Both Mike and I wave out the window, "We will see you soon!" we both cry out as we head down the street.

"By El, I can't wait to meet my little niece or nephew!" Holly's tearful goodbye follows us.

And, with one last wave from all of us, we turn a corner, and Mike's family disappears behind a row of other houses.

We pull ourselves back in from the window, and settle lightly into the carriage. We both let out heavy sighs of relief. "I know it's only been a day, but I can't wait to get back home" Mike sighs as he reaches for my hand.

I hum in return as I settle my head onto his shoulder, a sudden wave of tiredness washing over me. "It was great to meet your family, they were wonderful" I state, and I feel Mike chuckle.

"They loved you, I don't think I could have brought a more perfect

girl home to them" he says, and I look up to him, only to find his dark eyes staring back down at me. I give him a genuine, warm smile, "Thank you" is all I say, as he smiles back, bending down to capture my lips into a sweet kiss.

We pull away as the carriage bounces along, lulling us into a light sleep until we return home.

I know it was a shorter chapter, especially since I planned a longer one, but, I wanted to get this one out, and decided I'll probably do one more chapter added in to what I originally planned. I hope it wasn't too all over the place, I just really wanted to focus on Mike's reaction and his family's.

Season 3 of Stranger Things can't come soon enough! I usually don't like pushing time, but also where I live it's been in the negatives, so warmer weather would be amazing!

Hope you all enjoyed, and thank you for reading!

As always please review! I love hearing from you all!

43. The Banquet

Alright, I'm finally back! Just finished up the latest chapter for *Watching Her Fall In Love*, so, now I can get back to this one! Life has been extremely busy and chaotic as well, so writing has been difficult. But, as I've promised from the beginning, I will never abandon either of these *Stranger Things* stories. This one is just about done too, so thanks for hanging in there!

And Season 3 is coming July 4th! Can't wait!

Disclaimer: I do not own *Bloody Jack* or *Stranger Things*.

El's POV:

The travel back home doesn't take long, but after all the excitement that had happened in the last couple of days had made me very tired. However, if I also had to guess, something with growing a human inside me was sure to make me feel tired too.

Mike and I had drifted off into a comfortable rest as the carriage bumped along the road as we traveled home. And, finally the carriage rolls up to our home, where Joyce and Bob stand outside waiting to greet us.

I heave a heavy sigh of relief to be back home. It seems that the moment my brain and body put together that I was pregnant, the lovely morning sickness that came along with it, made itself well known. And the bumpy carriage ride made the nausea a thousand times worse.

So, the second the carriage door opens, I jump out as gracefully as possible and suck in a deep breath of air.

"Welcome home!" Joyce's voice is filled with laughter as she watches my dramatic intakes of breaths before her.

I cast her a smile, "Hello, Joyce" I say sweetly as we move to hug one another. "Was the carriage that bad?" she jokes as she takes a good look at me. I shake my head, "Just, not feeling well is all, and the

carriage didn't make it any easier".

Joyce nods, "Well, I'm sure you two are famished, I've got some warm soup all set for you" she nods towards the house.

Mike saddles up to me, "That sounds wonderful Joyce, thank you" he gives her his winning smile, which she returns.

"Of course, why don't you two get changed, and I'll grab Will, and we will enjoy lunch together" she says clapping her hands together.

"We'll see you in a bit then" I nod towards the woman, as Mike wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me along upstairs.

Once the door is closed to our room, I throw my hands up, "Get this damn thing off of me!" I growl, wishing I could just rip at the bloody corset myself, but unable to reach them.

Mike lets out a barking laugh as he too begins to loosen his neckerchief and tosses it haphazardly onto a nearby chair. He then approaches me, "Maybe you shouldn't be wearing these anymore, especially since you're pregnant", his suggestion is soft.

I nod eagerly, "Yes, I will only wear it once more at the dinner" I state as I start to feel my lungs expand as Mike expertly and quickly pulls away at my corset.

Once the laces have all been undone, the corset drops to the floor, and I take in another deep breath of air, "Ah, I will *never* understand why in the world we are forced to wear those things, they're torture devices" I growl as I pick up the dreaded thing and throw it roughly onto the bed.

Mike laughs once again, "I agree, you don't need that thing to look thin, you're perfect no matter what" he says while he works on his own tight jacket and buttons.

This comment catches me slightly and I turn towards him, approaching him from behind and I move to wrap my hands around his waist, as he freezes in his movements.

I smile as I lean my chin to rest on his shoulder, he chuckles, "What's

this for?" he jokes. And I hum, "Because I wish all men had the same opinion about looks as you do", and he nods in agreement.

However, another thought pops into my mind, "What about....what about when I begin to get fat, as the baby grows" my slight insecurities slipping into my mind.

But, the second the words are out of my mouth, Mike turns quickly in my arms, his hands coming to rest on either sides of my face, our dark eyes meet. "Don't you *ever* say anything like that, nor ever believe that, that is something that would ever cross my mind" his voice is low and firm.

He then moves one of his hands and places it gently on my stomach, which I can see has begun to swell slightly, giving light to the matter that there is something actually growing in there. Mike's eyes don't leave mine, "You...are growing something amazing within you, El, and your body will change, yes, but that doesn't mean you won't be the same beautiful woman I fell in love with. No matter what, you're the most astonishing woman I've ever laid eyes on".

His words sink deep within my heart and soul, because his words are so tender and meaningful, and I can begin to feel the welling of tears within my eyes.

I smile up to Mike, who's giving me a firm look, "You're the most amazing man, I hope you know that too", I whisper, and this breaks Mike's seriousness, "Guess we're perfect for each other than" he sighs.

I move to stand up on my tiptoes as I close the gap between us, our lips meeting together in a sweet embrace as we pour our love and devotion into that one moment. Breaking away, only to breathe.

We smile tenderly at one another once we break apart, I hum, "Let's finished getting ready, I'm starving, plus...we've got to tell Joyce and Will our exciting news" I throw a wink to Mike.

He nods eagerly, "Yes, I'm sure she will be excited", and I can only giggle in anticipation as we finish changing.

"You look better!" Joyce chirps as Mike and I make our way into the kitchen. I had dressed way down, and have a light dress that hangs loosely about, making me feel much less confined and tight, allowing my poor baby to actually breathe.

And, Mike changed down as well, as he has on a pair of his old sailor pants and loose fitting shirt.

"Yes, that corset is torturous" I roll my eyes in annoyance at the device, as Mike and I approach the dining room table. Mike moves sleekly so that he comes to stand behind my chair, pulling it out ever so smoothly, before I seat myself in the chair. I throw him a look of 'thank you', in which he merely blushes and nods in return as he seats himself beside me.

Will quickly enters the dining room just as Joyce sits, "Hi, Will!" I greet the boy, and he smiles as he makes his way to his chair, "Hey El, Mike" he nods to both of us.

We each tuck a napkin into our lap, as we move to eat our steaming stew. "So, how was visiting Mike's parents?" Will asks quickly as he stirs at his soup, looking between Mike and I.

I swallow the rich tomato soup that sits on my tongue, "Mm, it was really good" I say honestly, as I fall back into my soup, not saying anything else, and Will rolls his eyes, "Wow, don't stop going on and on about it" he says dryly.

I huff at him, "Well, what else do you want to know?" I throw him a look. He shrugs, "How was it meeting his parents, and...you've got sisters too right Mike?" he flicks his eyes over to Mike with the second question, Mike nods as he chews his bread, swallowing before speaking, "Yes, my older sister Nancy, and my little sister Holly" he explains.

I smile at this, "Yes, his sisters were quite wonderful, and his mother too" I coo to my husband beside me. Will chuckles a bit, "So, I'm guessing his father wasn't?" he tries to joke, but both Mike and I freeze in our movements, and Joyce gives us a look.

"Uhm..." I try to say, my voice growing quiet, not really wanting to

have to relive that moment again. Mike shakes his head, "My father's an arse is all, as long as my mother and sisters love El, that's all that matters" is what he says, his voice firm, ending the conversation about his father right there.

I try to change the subject quickly, "Anyways, his mother and sisters were lovely, and so sweet too".

Joyce smiles at this, "Must be nice being around more girls then?" I nod eagerly as I poke around my soup, "Yes, Holly's just a little sweetheart, and Nancy was really helpful" I shrug.

"Helpful how?" Joyce quips, and now, I stop my movements once again, and I turn to look at Mike, who's staring right back.

We silently communicate, "Now?", I say nonverbally at the raise of my eyebrow, and Mike understands the small gesture, he lets out a light cough as he pats at his mouth with his napkin, nodding at me.

"Everything okay?" Joyce asks as she looks between us. And now, I'm smiling brightly, "Well" I start as I reach for Mike's empty hand on the table, intertwining our hands, "While we were visiting, Nancy actually helped me figure something out".

"Oh, and what's that?" Will questions with earnest. And Mike and I give each other another shy smile, as I turn back to Joyce and Will, "Uh, well, I found out that I'm...I'm pregnant" I grin through the words.

Will's spoon drops with a clatter to his bowl, sending the red soup spattering about, as both he and Joyce stare wide eye at both of us.

"What?!" Joyce exclaims looking between us, and I nod eagerly, "I'm pregnant, I hadn't been feeling well, and a lot of weird things were going on and...I haven't bled for a couple months so..." but before I could finish Joyce is up and out of her seat, squealing as she approaches me.

I'm taken aback slightly as she wraps her arms around me, "Oh, that's wonderful news!" she squeals as I return her hug, "Thanks Joyce" I chuckle as she squeezes me tighter.

"Wow, you really are?" Will's quiet voice perks from the other side of the table, and just as Joyce pulls away, our eyes meet from across the table and I nod.

I watch as Will's smile grows tenfold as he more slowly comes around the table, and gives me a tight hug as well, "That's amazing El, congrats!" he says and I melt into his embrace, just as Joyce moves and envelops Mike into a hug as well, "Oh, this is so exciting for the two of you! We'll have to start getting everything planned!"

And seconds later, Joyce is moving about wildly, "We'll have to get a crib, and blankets and paint a room and...", but before she gets more worked up I call out a small, "Joyce!" and she turns to look at me and I give her a soft look, "We've got plenty of time, don't worry".

Joyce relaxes at this as she settles back into her seat, but the grin never leaves, "My, I never thought this would happen so soon! But, it's definitely exciting!"

Mike and I look at each other with a loving look. "Yes, we are just as excited" I say as Mike gives my hand a tight squeeze, knowing full well that everything will be just fine.

The next couple of days pass by in a whir as Mike, Will and I get ready for the banquet that is only a few days away. In the meantime, Joyce finds herself fussing over me like a mother duck trying to keep her ducklings in line.

I have to tell her over and over again that everything is fine, except for the annoying occasional morning sickness, which I do not like what so ever.

I've come to keep a bucket beside my bed since the nausea comes in waves and does not occur every day. But, I'm more than happy to have Mike by my side each time it happens.

For, the second he begins to hear my retching begin, he throws back the cover, and is by my side, making sure my long hair doesn't end up in my sick, as he rubs my back soothingly, whispering words of endearment.

When I'm done, I'll give him a watery 'thank-you' as he helps me get cleaned up. And as I watch him fuss over me, I can't help but think as to how lucky I am to have him by my side.

Another thing that Joyce suggests is that we pay a visit to the local doctor, just to make sure everything is okay, and to let me know of my expectant nature so that he can expect a call from us when I go into labor.

So, Mike, Joyce and I make our way down to the local doctor, who is more than happy to give me an examination.

I'm half relieved to see that his facility is clean, and that he is a sweet middle aged man, named Dr. River.

He greets us in a happy tone as he has me sit on the examination bed. "I've delivered more babies than you know, it's become a specialty of mine" he states as he has me pull up my loose dress, exposing my just bulging stomach.

His hands are a little cold as he pokes and prods at my stomach, using different wooden tools to tap this way and that on my stomach.

Then, he takes a metal tool, and places it gently against my lower stomach, placing his ear at the other end. We sit in silence, waiting, and then he smiles, "Ah, there it is, the little one's heart beat" he says pulling away.

"You can hear it?" I ask and he nods, "Of course, babies heartbeats are a lot faster than their mothers, so it's easy to distinguish, yours here is definitely strong, and beating well" he says with a smile.

I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding, as Mike's hand loosens in mine, having held onto it quite tightly.

He then moves and examines my more private area, which I can tell upsets Mike slightly, but I give him a soft look, and that seems to help him move past it.

"Yep, cervix and fluid look good too", he starts. "Now, when was the last time you bled?" he throws me the question, and at this I really have to think.

I begin to count back to how long it had been since Ireland, guessing it was then when Mike and I conceived. "Uhm..about three months or so?" shrugging.

The doctor nods as he moves to his desk and begins scrawling out some notes, "Alright, about three months along, if not more so..." he then starts counting, "About, mid spring, April, or May, is when you'll be expecting your little one", he nods towards my stomach.

I can't help the smile that grows on my face, "That'll be a perfect time to have a child" Mike's voice captures my exact thoughts.

"That it will be, not too hot, not too cold. Just make sure you eat your fruits to prevent scurvy, and check in every couple months, okay?" Dr. River beams at Mike and I, and we nod in agreement, as we make our way out of his office.

"My, a spring baby, that's when Will was born, couldn't have asked for a better time" Joyce coos as we walk back to our home.

Mike's arm is around my waist, squeezing me close, and I marvel at the excitement about the whole thing. In a handful of months, Mike and I are going to be parents, and, within my mind, I'm thoroughly excited and terrified at the same time.

But, as I feel Mike's arms around me, I know I have nothing to worry about.

The day of the banquet finally arrives, and I am once again tethered into my awful corset. I honestly wish I could be wearing my naval uniform, but, since I'm a woman after all, that cannot be done. I do, however, grab my midshipman's jacket, that I will drape behind my chair so that all will see what I have accomplished.

I sit in front of my mirror as I finish adjusting small pins in my hair to keep my tight curls at bay. I settle back in the seat and turn my head side to side, and finally nod to my reflection believing that I look good enough.

I rise from the stool, just as the bedroom door opens and Mike

saunters in. I turn to look at him, and he freezes the moment his eyes fall on me.

His mouth gapes open and I can't help but flush and giggle. He takes a slow step towards me, "Wow, El...you look...stunning" his eyes roam my body from top to bottom.

I grin widely showing him my teeth as I swirl about in my dress. It really is quite pretty, it's a midnight blue, that is adorned with lovely pink ribbon that lace this way and that up my bodice.

"You like it?" I tease him as I saunter towards him, as my hands move to finish buttoning his golden buttons of his own midshipman uniform.

He can barely speak, as his mouth twitches upwards, "You're breathtaking" is all he's able to say as I finish up with his buttons, as I lay my hands upon his lapels, smiling brilliantly up at him.

"And you look just as ravishing, my handsome husband" I cast him an adorning look, which he returns. Mike quirks up his eyebrow slightly as he swoops in and captures his lips with mine.

Our breathing begins to sync with one another as Mike pulls me closer to him, our lips dancing to their well known song.

I feel the stirring within both of us, and I'm starting to contemplate even going to the banquet and maybe just having Mike and I ravish one another instead.

And it seems that Mike might have the same idea as his nimble hands move up and down my body. I small moan elicits from the back of my throat, and I know it drives him crazy.

But, before we can get too lost in ourselves, there's a knock at our door, and we break away quickly as a voice comes through the thick wood, "Guys, you almost ready? The carriage is waiting for us" Will's says from the other side.

"Yes, we'll be down in a second!" I cry back and then Mike's even darker eyes find mine, "Hmm, we always get interrupted" he sighs as he strokes at my neck, which I bend into.

I give him a coy smile, "Maybe when we return" I throw him a flirtatious wink, as I sadly pull away, grabbing Mike's hand and pull him towards the door. "As much as I would love to continue this moment, I really can't wait to see our friends", I admit.

Mike laughs, "Yeah, it will be great to see everyone, even though it's only been a couple of weeks".

"We spent seven years on a ship together, being apart for a couple of weeks feels like a lifetime" my voice heavy as we descend the stairs together.

"Don't you two look wonderful together!" Joyce praises as we arrive in the foyer. We both flash her smiles, as my sight lands on Will, who too, is dressed in his uniform.

"Will, you look so handsome!" I coo to him, as his face erupts into red. "Thanks" he whispers as he tries to hide his face.

Joyce then begins to pull at our arms, "Alright you three, the carriage has been waiting long enough, time for you all to get a move on" she says quickly as she ushers us out the door.

We approach the carriage and I sigh, struggling to get up the wooden steps with my corset tight. I hear Will and Mike chuckling over my shoulder, and once they are easily settled into the carriage, I give them quick whacks across their shoulders.

"We'll see you later, mom!" Will calls out as we wave to Joyce from inside the cabin. And moments later, we are off.

After an hour of a somewhat bumpy ride along in the carriage, my stomach once again whirling with nausea and I'm sure a bouncing baby, we finally arrive to the banquet hall.

The driver opens our door, and we each step out one at a time. Mike holds out his hand to steady me as I step onto the cobblestones.

"Finally", I breathe a sigh of relief to being out from the carriage. I silently choose in that moment that I will be walking most everywhere to avoid this awful feeling until the baby comes.

Mike smiles to me as he offers me his arm, in which I interlace with my own. "Come on, let's find the others" he suggests, as Will and I walk beside him.

I take in our surroundings, the banquet hall is an old cathedral like building. With its tall marble structure and high ceilings that are decorated to the nines.

There are many carriages and coaches arriving all at once. Men and women alike. I catch the familiar faces of some of the men who had sailed on other vessels and who fought alongside us while taking down the monster's island.

But, I had yet to set my eyes on any of our crewmates.

We enter the large hall, and there are a sea of tables before us that are finely decorated and covered in rich white cloth.

A man in a fine dark suit greets us at the door, "Names, and ship served on" he sniffs. We look at each other, until I step in, "Eleanor Wheeler, *The Hawk*" I state, the man gives me a once over, scoffing at me.

"I don't need *your* name, what's your husband's name?" he asks turning to look at Mike. And, I feel the rage building within me, "I *did* serve on that ship, check the list" I growl. The man looks at me, opening his mouth to speak again, but Mike steps in, "She did, she was the one who took down the monster's island".

And at this, the man chortles, my anger pulses through me. "A *women* on a *ship*!" he laughs in my face and I so badly want to smack his grin off his face, I must have begun the action, because Will steps forward, grabbing onto my hand and gives me a quick smile.

"Why not just amuse us, and look?" he tries to reason. The man in the fine suit huffs and then looks through the list. "Alright, *The Hawk*, let's see..." and his white gloved finger trails down the list, his smug look holding tight, that is, when he hits the bottom of the page, where his eyes widen, and he blinks a couple times, almost as if he's not reading the ledger correctly.

The smug look now transfers to my face, "So, am I on there, or not?" I give the man a tight look. He casts his gaze upwards as I twitch an eyebrow up, baiting him to try me again, when he swallows and nods, "Well, it seems you're there, along with....your husband...I presume".

I nod slowly, "Yes, Michael and Eleanor Wheeler, and William Byers" I point to Will by my side.

"Uhm, right, my mistake", he growls as he makes a note on the ledger as he points over to a far table. "Table eleven, you'll see your ships name labeled there".

"Thank you" I say gruffly as I heave my midshipman jacket higher up my back, casting the man a tight look, as I pull both Mike and Will in the direction of our table.

Once we're out of earshot I open my mouth to spew, "What an ass!" I cry in disbelief and Mike and Will exchange frightened looks as we move towards our table.

"He definitely was" Mike agrees as our table comes into view, and I want to continue to fume, but there are familiar faces that I begin to notice, and my anger fades away.

"El!" Steve is the first to rise from the table as he approaches us. And I can't help but wrap myself into his arms, "Hi, Steve!" I greet in return as he pulls away and gives me a quick spin.

He whistles, "Alright Wheeler, how'd you land such a pretty lady" he jokes to Mike who rolls his eyes. "It's called being a nice guy" he quips back.

"Hey, El" Jonathan comes from behind Steve and I'm quick to give him a hug as well. "Hey, Jonathan, it's good to see you" I give him a soft smile.

And just then, Will is by our sides as he moves in to give Jonathan a hug as well. My heart flutters at their interaction, knowing that the two were like brothers when we were aboard the ship.

Then I hear a montage of voices behind us, "Hey, there they are!" a

very well known voice cuts through the murmur of other voices within the hall.

We all turn to look and my heart swells as I watch as Dustin, Max and Lucas cut through the crowd, avoiding people here and there, just to make it to us.

Max is the first to make it to me, and we squeal in delight as we embrace, "Oh, it's so good to see you!" Max cries as she holds onto me. "I know, even a couple weeks away and it feels like forever!" I state as we pull apart.

Max then turns to Mike and Will giving them hugs, as I turn to Lucas and Dustin to do the same.

"Man, I don't think we can go that long without seeing each other" Dustin jokes, and we all chuckle in agreement.

"You kids aren't sick of each other yet?" a deep voice cuts through everyone's, and I stop in my spot, as I turn to the very well known voice. His light eyes meet mine, and I'm pretty sure I'm crying as I rush towards the olderman and throw myself into his arms, which he returns.

"Hopper!" I cry as I tuck into his chest. "Hey, E, it's good to see ya" his voice is gruff. I pull away with a brilliant smile, "Even a couple weeks away from you sucked too" I joke.

He laughs as he turns to the others, giving the boys firm handshakes, and Max a small hug as well. "Well, it seems I can't just get rid of you lot, now can I?"

I shake my head at him, "Nope, you're stuck with us for forever I guess".

I open my mouth to speak more, but a loud trumpeting is heard through the hall. All voices fall at the noise as we turn to the front of the room. There, on the stage stands a man dressed in a fancy uniform who is looking across the crowd.

"Welcome! If I could ask you all to find your seats please?" his loud voice cuts across the hall, so we all turn towards our table, and take

our seats. Many other crew members have joined as well, and I give them all small quick waves as we are seated.

I then turn my attention back to the man who stands before us all, "It is with prestigious honor to have all of you fine gentlemen and ladies here with us tonight, I am here to present the honors to those who had fought in our most current war against the fiends that laid destruction upon our land for many years".

"It is with the King's great pleasure to have you all hear tonight..." and the man continues to go on and on about the troubled times we had to deal with while the monsters continued to destroy our towns and such. I half listen to most of his speech, but, my mind doesn't really stay too focused on what he's saying, as my stomach growls, knowing that there will be food served soon, and I rub my stomach affectionately. As I also know that there is another being growing within me that is demanding food as well.

Slowly, I look up to the man giving his long winded speech, when a word catches my attention, "We will be starting to serve food in a moment, and afterwards we will begin with the awards".

I sigh in relief at the mention of food, as the man moves away from the stage, and now the murmur of voices begin to fill the space, I turn back to our table.

"Well, that was long winded", Max rolls her eyes, I can't help but giggle, "That it was, they should have served us food first, *then* have that guy blabber on".

"So, what have you guys been up to?" Mike pipes in looking around at our small group of friends, Dustin grins at this, "Well, Max met my mom, and, she, loved her" he gushed giving Max a look.

I watch as her face turns very red as she attempts to roll her eyes in attempt of annoyance, but the small smirk that plays at the corner of her lip says otherwise that she's annoyed.

"That's great, does that mean a wedding is soon?" I tease, and at this remark, both Dustin and Max turn red as Lucas and Will join in laughing at the poor couple.

And, seconds later, there are a bunch of men and woman circling through the large hall, carrying steaming trays of food, and my stomach growls as a plate of meat, potatoes and a variety of vegetables is placed in front of me.

I can see I'm not the only one who's hungry, because we all shut our mouths with talking and only open them to place a forkful of food into our awaiting mouths.

It's definitely good, but after being back home and enjoying Joyce's home cooked meals, there something about them that are much more delicious than these one's.

Small talk is exchanged between all of us, as we finish up our meal, when Lucas turns to Mike and I, "So, we've all talked about ourselves, what about you guys, anything new?"

And at his question, I feel my chest tighten, as I swallow my last bit of food, and I turn to look to Mike. We both knew we were going to tell our friends tonight about how our family would be growing, but we hadn't expected it to come up so soon.

When Mike gives me a knowing look and nod, I know that he's okay with me telling everyone, so I move and interlace my fingers with him as I look towards our friends, who are giving us anxious looks.

"Actually, Mike and I do have something new to share...we're-" but before I can continue, the damn blasting trumpet rings throughout the hall.

I glare over at the trumpeter, as the man before takes the stage once again, calling our attention. I huff, and Mike leans into me and whispers, "Don't worry, there'll be plenty of time later". I silently nod as I give my friends a quick shrug of my shoulder, my attention returning back to the man speaking.

"So, as the King has decreed, every Captain and his ship will receive this award" he says as he holds up a gleaming golden crest, my eyes widen as I take in the sight. "Also, a generous ration will be given to each ship as well, so that each seaman can take home some extra pay to their family".

At this, there are cheers all around, and the man upfront motions for the rest of us to settle. "We will begin with the armada, Captain Harold of the *Vengeance*, will you please come forward?"

And this continues on for a very long time, as the man continues to call up Captain after Captain and awarding them with the illustrious award.

"Now, there were a handful of ships that played a larger role in this war, and these Captain's will be receiving a bit more distinguished awards", my ears prick up at this, noting that Hopper had yet to be called up.

As time ticks by, I look through the sea of tables and note that Hopper will probably be the last one awarded. And, no sooner had this thought entered my mind did the man on the stage speak.

"Now, our last award goes to a Captain, his ship and crew that went above and beyond in action. This ship allotted many crew members who boarded the treacherous island and were able to destroy it", once his voice stops, the entire hall hoots and hollers at our success.

The man holds up a hand to silence us, and a hush falls onto the crowd, "Now, will Captain James Hopper of *The Hawk*, please come forward?"

And at this, Hopper, who is at the head of our table looks dumbfounded. His eyes catch mine, and I give him a winning smile, as I gesture for him to stand. He awkwardly gets to his feet as he makes his way towards the stage, walking up it slowly.

The man turns to Hopper, who still looks dumbfounded, and I giggle into my hand.

"Captain Hopper and his crew did the one thing that many ships had tried and failed to do. They discovered the island of the monsters and effectively destroyed it so that we no longer had to worry, it is thanks to Captain Hopper and his crew that we can all sleep soundly at night", the man speaks.

"So, as ordered from the King himself, I present Captain Hopper with

the medal of honor, with the King's crest, fashioned out of gold, along with the medal of valor that will be honored to his ship and undying crew".

And with this, the man holds out the long medal as Hopper ducks his head and receives the medal, the second it's around his neck, I stand to my feet, clapping, and only seconds later do Mike, our friends and the rest of the crew stand to cheer for Hopper. He turns in our direction and gives us an awkward grin.

The whole room is now clapping and cheering for him, and I can feel my heart swell looking at the man.

Once the room settles down, the man who gave Hopper his medal speaks once again, "Captain, would you like to say some words?"

And at this Hopper stutters lightly, but takes a step forward looking around the room, taking us all in. I watch in anticipation as he takes in a deep breath and begins to speak.

"I've...I've uhm, been serving under the King for...well, a long time now. And the monster threat was one of the biggest I had ever dealt with" he begins.

He swallows another breath of air, "I started my career young, left for a short period of time to raise a family, but, returned once again. But, I never knew that when I returned that I'd be receiving some *very* interesting crew members", and at this Hopper turns towards our table, as he quirked an eyebrow up at me before moving back to face the crowd.

"I have lead many men, of many different qualities in my lifetime, but...if you told me that one day, a woman would come aboard my ship and give me a run for my money, I would never have believed you", at his words, the room falls even more silent, waiting for Hopper to continue.

"I learned in my last journey that, it doesn't matter who you are, whether you are a man or woman, that...as long as you are passionate and fearless, you can do anything", his words are soft, and I can feel my heart ramming against my ribcage.

He stops for a moment, but then continues, "Eleanor Wheeler stepped onto *The Hawk*, with her brother, but, she registered as Elliot Brenner, no one knew that one of these two twelve year old kids, was a girl" he chuckled.

"And, she was able to pull off this facade for *many* years, none of us the wiser, which shows you how observant us males are", and at this the crowd laughs along with him.

"But, the moment a few of us discovered her true nature, I found that I really didn't care, because-" and at this he looks at me, swallowing before continuing, "Because, the strength and determination she showed, for years, was exactly that of her peers, just because she was a woman, didn't mean she couldn't do any less than her crewmates, and she proved that every single day".

"And, on the day of the battle, she showed more courage than any man that day would of, for, she was the one who made sure everyone was off the island before she lit the barrels filled with gunpowder. She was the one who was blasted hundreds of feet and survived. She was the one who destroyed the island, and...because of that-" he says, while he brings his hands up to grab the medal wrapped around his neck and pulls it upwards, and shows it to me, "She deserves this medal, not me" he shakes his head.

Now I can feel the tears slowly leaving my eyes as I try to hold back the sob that wants to escape from my throat. "El, come up here and receive this medal" he states, and I feel as if a million eyes are on me, but, then I feel a tight squeeze and I look to see Mike grinning at me like a fool, as tears are welling in his eyes as well, he gives me a nod and mouths, 'go on'.

I'm pretty sure I look just like Hopper did when he was called up on stage as I stand. For, now everyone can see me, the woman who spent years traveling along the seas with a crew of men, deceiving them for the most of it too.

The hall is silent as my shoes click against the marble beneath my feet. The eyes that are trained on me follow me all the way up to the stage, and I feel a sense of relief once I get to Hopper.

He gives me a winning smile as I stand next to him, looking up at him with big eyes, I open my mouth to speak, words failing me for a moment before I'm able to choke out, "But, Hopper, this is yours" I squeak.

He chuckles shaking his head, "No El, this is *yours*, and you know it" he whispers as he holds the medal up, waiting for me to bend my head. I search his eyes once again, and seeing that he will never take 'no' for an answer, I sigh, bending my head, as the cool ribbon settles onto my neck. The weight of the medal hangs between my breasts, an honor I'm supposed to wear proudly.

I feel a hand on my shoulder as I lift my head and look at Hopper, desperately trying not to cry. "This woman, has done more than a thousand men put together, and-" he points towards our table, "Her friend, too, another woman, also put her life on the line for our crew, if I've learned anything from this voyage, it's that woman can do anything a man can, if not more".

Both Hopper and I smile to one another, and then, I slowly look into the crowd, and I worry slightly because there are looks of uncertainty across the faces of men and women.

But, then I hear a clapping noise, and I turn towards the source, and there, standing, is Mike, the lone clapper, and seconds later, the rest of our friends joined in, and then our whole table. And, moments later women begin to stand, and even men too. It's not the whole room, but to see that so many men and women are standing and applauding my work, it makes my heart and soul sing.

Hopper pulls me into his embrace and I smile into his chest, "You did good kid, you did good" he whispers, and I sob happily into his jacket.

The banquet finally ends as we all make our way out into the fresh night air, and we sigh in relief since the hall had become quite stuffy over time.

My arm is draped tightly over Mike's extended arm as I hold onto him tightly, my midshipman's jacket is wrapped around me to help

with the coolness around me.

As we try to gather together outside there are many people who approach me, "You're such an inspiration", one woman says as we pass by, "Geez, I think you have more balls than every man in that room" another chuckles. And there are many more that await me.

Our friends, Jonathan, Steve and Hopper join us in a tight circle as we chat idly, as we await our carriages to bring us home.

"Wow, I thought that was never going to end!" Max sighs as she plants herself on the nearby knee wall.

"Yeah, that was pretty long" Lucas sighs as he kicks at a nearby stone. I smile at them as I fiddle with the medal that dangles from my neck.

"It was great to see how many people supported El too, that was great Hopper" Will speaks up, as the others agree.

"Tch, was nothing, kid deserved it" he nods to me, and I flush in embarrassment. "Could have done it without a couple hundred people watching" I tease.

He huffs, "People needed to know kid, you deserve a lot of praise". "Yeah, learn to take a compliment" Mike teases me as he plants a quick kiss to my forehead.

Just then, a carriage pulls up, and Max sighs, "This is ours, we've got to be heading out" she says sadly. My shoulders droop, not wanting to say goodbye just yet.

"We need to get together soon" I say approaching her and giving Max a tight hug, "Yes, we definitely do!" she agrees as she pulls away. I turn to give Dustin and Lucas a hug as well, but, just as I pull away from Lucas, he takes in a quick air of breath turning to look at me, "Oh, I forgot!" he said pointing a finger at me.

I give him a curious look, "What?" He smiles, "You and Mike didn't get to finish what news you had" he reminded me. And it hits me right there that I *had* totally forgotten to finish telling them the good news.

"That's right, we did" I smile moving to Mike, and now all eyes are on us, Mike once again giving me a nod to continue.

"Well, Mike and I just recently found out that, well...I'm pregnant", and gasps are heard all around as everyone gives us wide eyes and gaping mouths.

"You are!?" Max cries, throwing her hands up in the air and I nod wildly as I pat my small bump, "Yes, we're due in the spring" I say happily, and seconds later, Max is tackling into me screaming with happiness, "Oh, I knew it!" she cries as she bounces us both up and down, I can't help but laugh along.

The boys turn to Mike, giving him high-fives and pats on the back, "Nice, Mike, knew this would probably be coming up soon" Dustin jokes and Mike rolls his eyes, but a smile dances on his face.

"Whatever guys, we're married, things happen" he shrugs his shoulders and the boys laugh.

The boys then turn to give me hugs as well. "Can't meet the little fella!" Dustin gives me a tight squeeze.

"It could be a girl you know" Max gives him an incredulous look. "Could be both" Will jokes and I smack him, "Don't even say that!" I growl at him, and everyone chuckles.

I pat my stomach, "We will just have to see when it's born" I singsong, as Hopper approaches me with a soft look, "Well, at least you waited till after you were off the ship, you always promised there would be no little Wheelers running around" he bends and gives me a tight squeeze.

I huff as we pull apart, "Well, I was pregnant, but, yes, at least I didn't have to give birth on board".

"Yeah, don't know how that would've gone over" he chuckles.

"Well, we will definitely be stopping by soon, now that we know a little one is on their way", Max sighs as she moves to pat my stomach.

I hum, "Yes, I think monthly visits are in order" I say looking at all of

our friends and even Hopper. He gives me a look, "Who, me?" and I roll my eyes, "Yes! You to Hopper!" I poke his side as he smacks away my hand.

He sighs, "Whatever you say", but he smiles at me and I know he will stop by from time to time.

Max, Lucas, Dustin, Jonathan and Steve clamber into their carriage. We exchange 'goodbyes' and wave to our friends as they disappear into the night.

Mike's arm wraps around my waist pulling me close as I sigh watching them leave. "Don't worry, we'll see them soon" he places a kiss on my temple as I give him a side hug, "I know, I just can't wait to see them again", I sigh as our carriage arrives, Mike, Will and I entering, as we wave goodbye to him.

"Promise you'll visit!" I yell from the carriage window, he rolls his eyes, "Don't worry kid, I'll see you soon".

And, I watch out the window, continuing to wave to Hopper until I can see him no more, as I rest my head against Mike's chest, allowing the exhaustion of the day to take over as I fall asleep.

Well, got that written in two days and out shortly after releasing the latest chapter to Watching Her Fall In Love, I think that's a record!

Hope the whole banquet thing wasn't too boring or anything, just wanted to get the gang back together and have them learn about El's pregnancy, because, well, my next chapter will FINALLY be the LAST ONE! And of course I will be doing an epilogue, so don't fret!

I will probably be focusing on this story first just so I can wrap it up and get it tucked neatly away so I can solely focus on my other story.

Thank you to all who left wonderful comments and who have been following this story since the beginning! Hope it is wrapping it up in a way you expected!

As always, I love reviews, and always look forward to seeing them, until next time!

44. A New Addition

Alrighty, as promised, this will be the last chapter to my story, it's really hard to believe I started writing this story a year ago! Like, where did the time go?! And, like I said before, there will be an epilogue as well.

Just note, there will be some time skipping in this chapter as well. I truly hope I can wrap it up the way you were all expecting!

So, here we go...

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

El's Point of view:

The days pass uneventfully as Mike and I settle into our home. It seems as if we spend most days getting ready for the arrival of our first child.

It's hard to not giggle as Mike takes to building just about everything that our little baby will need once they arrive. He insisted that he would build our child's crib, and so, just days after the banquet he and Will spend the day in town grabbing their needed material as they began to build the much needed crib.

I spend my days mostly with Joyce as she begins to teach me the needed skills I will need when the baby is born. She has taken to my old dolls and has me practice applying a cloth diaper to them over and over again, until I'm pretty sure I can do it with my eyes closed.

What's even better is that Joyce insists that Mike join in as well, who doesn't even blink an eye at the suggestion. My heart swells each time I watch Mike gently change my old dolls diapers, as Joyce coaches him on the proper way to swaddle and hold a child. He never once complains or shys away from anything Joyce has to offer us.

As I watch him in one of these moments, my mind drifts to a moment that had happened just a couple days ago.

Will had offered to walk with me through town as he needed to get more supplies for the crib that Mike was currently at home working on. I had found daily walks with the fresh air tended to help with my nausea, that was finally, thankfully subsiding.

Throughout my endeavors into town, I couldn't help but be drawn to the other mothers in the town and listen in on their conversations. For some reason, I felt as if I needed to listen to everything, hoping to pick up some advice from the mother's, however, I found this backfired slightly, especially on this particular outing.

Will and I had just arrived to the local produce stall. My eyes flick between the greens that I'm searching for, when a gaggle of women come to stand behind me, awaiting their turn.

"Oh, Henry, he never helps with the new ones, always waits till they are old enough to walk" one of their voices catches me off guard, I freeze slightly, moving my head slightly to see the woman out of the corner of my eye. She seems older, but her stomach is *very* swollen, and it's easy to see she is due very soon.

I pick up a bundle of carrots and place them in my basket, pretending to be too involved in picking out vegetables than paying attention to the woman. However, my ears continue to listen in.

"I understand, Marge, Toby *never* wants anything to do with the kids, enjoys making them, but once they're out, it's like they barely exist", one of the mother chuckles lightly, as the other two woman nod in agreement. I feel my heart sink slightly, as I finish up at the stall, and move to join Will who's waiting patiently off to the side.

The second I'm beside him, he speaks, "Don't listen to them" Will's words startle me. I turn to look at him, and see that he's giving me a look, and I shake my head, "What do you mean?" I try not to sound as if I had been listening to the mothers ranting.

Will laughs, "You're too obvious, each time we come to the market, it's like you're seeking out anyone who has a child, just to see what they have to say".

I let out a long breath, "Sorry...I know...I guess I'm just nervous" I

shrug my shoulders.

I feel Will's hand on my shoulder, bringing me in for a short squeeze as we walk to our next destination, "You have nothing to worry about, *especially* with Mike, you know he's going to be a great dad, nothing like these harpy's husbands" he nods his head in the general direction of where the woman were.

"I know, and that's what makes me feel awful about this whole thing. Mike *will* be a great dad, I think I'm more worried about me" I say sadly.

Will nudges my shoulder, "You'll be great too, and you've got a lot of people who will be around to help too", he reminds me.

I smile gently at him as I swing the basket that holds our goods, "Thanks Will, I guess that I just wish there were more girls my age that were pregnant too, seems like they're all older".

Will chuckles, "Well, you're lucky to have met your husband on a ship, most girls your age already have been married for years, have a couple of kids and are complaining like those other woman".

I laugh at this, "Yeah, I guess that's true". As we continue through the market, I feel slightly guilty for listening in on the women and feeling as if the same story would be true for Mike and I.

Especially now, as I bring myself back to look at Mike, who is carefully cradling my dolls head in the crook of his arm. And even though it's fake, he holds onto it as if it were made of glass. A smile pulls itself across my face, as I watch him, knowing that he will *never* be like any of those woman's husband. And in that moment I thank my lucky stars that Mike will be the father to our children.

A month has passed since the banquet, and the colder weather begins to settle upon our town. Not only this, but my stomach has begun to show more, a small beacon stating that I am currently pregnant.

Mike loves my growing bump, as every night when we lay in bed together, he gently lifts my nightshirt, and gazes at it. He'll run his

hand up and down the smooth patch of skin, and fall into a hypnosis as he talks gently to our baby that grows within my stomach.

I've come to enjoy the small bump as well. For, I find myself just standing and running my hands up and down the new feature, and I find it very soothing.

Currently, that's what I find myself doing as I stand by the large window in the living room that overlooks the town. My mind drifts as I rub my stomach, thinking about whether our child will be a boy or a girl, or who they will look like.

I get so lost in thought that the knock that comes from the nearby door startles me. I move towards the entranceway as another string of knocks come through.

I huff at the impatience of whoever is knocking, "I'm coming!" I yell through the hallway leading to the door, and continue to grumble while I open the door, "Geez, I was coming you don't have to...Hopper!" my voice jumps as my eyes settle on the gruff looking man who stands before me.

He gives me a look, "Sorry kid, didn't think anyone heard the first one" he chuckles as I shake my head at him, moving to give him a hug, which he returns.

I pull away with a smile, "It's good to see you, what brings you by?" I question as I usher him into our home.

He's wearing a thicker coat to stave off the cold that drifts in behind him, making me shiver. He bristles slightly as he moves about, his head moving in all directions taking a look at the home.

"Ah, not much kid, you asked me to stop by, so...here I am" he shrugs his shoulders and I giggle at him.

"Of course, I'm glad you stopped by, I was hoping someone we knew would soon, it gets a little boring around here sometimes. Here, let me take your jacket" I say as I gesture towards his large coat.

The older man nods as he sheds his top layer, however, he doesn't give it to me, "Just point me where to put it".

I roll my eyes, "Hop, come on, I'm trying to show some hospitality", I state. He huffs, "It's *fine*, besides this coat's a little heavy".

His words catch me off guard, "Why should that matter?" I ask him. He straightens slightly opening and closing his mouth a couple times before words are finally able to form for him, "Uhm...well...you know" he shrugs and then gestures towards my stomach.

I huff, "Hop, it's fine, I just can't life really heavy things, I doubt your jacket falls into that category".

He narrows his eyes at me, "Kid, I get that you want to be all hospitable and such, but..just let me hang my own jacket?" he stresses. And I can tell he's trying to hold back, so I grumble and lead him down the hallway slightly where our coat rack stands.

I gesture towards the small piece of furniture, in which Hopper gently hangs his coat. I give him a look and just shakes his head at me, "Enough, why don't you show me around, and where they other two?" Hopper growls as I lead him into our living room.

A smile grows on my face, "Mike's out in barn, he's been working tirelessly on a crib" I say as I pat my stomach, "And Will, he's out in the barn doing his chores".

Hopper nods at my explanation and once again gestures towards my stomach, "Well, you've grown" he states lamely, and I can't help but laugh at his awkwardness, "Yes, thank you Hop, that's something *every* pregnant woman wants to hear".

The older man takes a step back, "Hey, it's been awhile since I've been around an expectant woman" he tries to defend.

I shake my head at him, "Didn't you say you had a daughter? I'm sure you didn't say stuff like that to your wife" I tease.

And at this I notice Hopper stiffens slightly, and then I remember, stupidly, that he had lost his little girl, and I fumble over my next words, "Oh, Hopper, I'm sorry... I didn't mean-" I start, but Hopper's lip curls slightly and waves me off, "It's fine kid, it's been many years since Sara's been gone".

I duck my head slightly in embarrassment, not sure what to say next. But, then Hopper takes a large step forward and raises his hand to ruffle my hair, "Hey!" I grumble at him, looking up into his face, in which now holds a large smile, "Besides, I've had you and the others to look after, that was enough for me".

He gives me a genuine look, and I know he truly means those words, for, they hold true for me as well. Out at sea, Hopper was more a father to me than my own, and for him to see me as a daughter, it warms my heart.

I grin up at him and take hold of his arm, "Come on, you must be hungry, Joyce will probably have something ready in the kitchen", I say as I drag him towards the kitchen.

"You've got a nice house here kid, how'd you acquire it?" his voice is low as I pull him along the hallways.

"It's my childhood home, my parents left it to me, and Joyce has taken care of it, she's Will mother" I explain as we arrive to the swinging door leading to the kitchen.

Hopper grunts behind me as an assurance that he heard me. As we enter the kitchen, the heat envelops me, which I greatly appreciate on this cold day, as the smell of herbs and other ingredients fill my nose.

I can see the swaying body of Joyce, who is bent over the cauldron. I make our presence known, "Hello Joyce, it smells delicious in here, mind if we join you?"

Joyce startles slightly at my voice, and turns quickly to face me, speaking quickly, "Oh, of course dear, it's almost done, who-" but her question falls short as her eyes widen, settling on Hopper behind me.

I glow slightly, excited to finally introduce Joyce to Hopper, "Joyce, this is Captain Hopper, he took care of me and the boys while we were out at sea", I begin to explain, as I look between the two, whom seem to be locked in a staring contest.

Neither say anything, and I flick my eyes back and forth between

them, slightly confused. "Uhm, Joyce, did you hear me?" and at my words, she startles slightly, and shakes her head, "Oh, I'm sorry sweetie, yes I heard you" she smiles brightly as she makes her way towards Hopper.

She grabs a handful of her apron, wiping away any stew she has on her hand before extending it shyly towards Hopper, "Hello, I'm Joyce, El and the boys have told me a lot about you".

I look to Hopper, who seems flabbergasted, and my eyes narrow in on his face, because, he looks like he's blushing, and it's something I've never seen before.

Finally, he reaches out his large hand, and grips Joyce's tightly, before they shake them together. "Uh, yeah, the names James...erm....Jim Hopper" he nods, grinning brightly at Joyce.

This, is extremely surprising to me, I had never seen Hopper, or Joyce act this way towards *anyone* of the opposite sex. A secret smile grows across my face as I watch their small interactions with one another.

It doesn't take long for Joyce to invite Hopper to stay for dinner, as I finally tug him away from the kitchen to show him the rest of the house.

He's definitely resistant at first, however, he complies as I begin to show him around.

"And, this" I start as I show the older man around upstairs, "Is where the baby's room will be". I push open the door slowly as Hopper follows closely behind me.

There's not much to look at right now, for, we had new wallpaper in light green laid across the walls and various pieces of furniture lay scattered about. Because, Mike and I had agreed to wait for the crib to be finished before setting up the room the way we want it to be.

"It's not much now, but, in a short time it will be perfect" I gaze upon the room, and gently rub my hands down my stomach, my hands landing just below my bump.

Hopper hums in agreement as his eyes search the room, taking everything in. He doesn't say much as his heavy footfalls echo across the room. He stops at a grouping of stuffed animals, reaching to pick up a small teddy bear he gives it a once over.

"That was Will's, he gave it to us to give to the baby when he or she arrives" I shrug my shoulders trying to make small talk. Hopper nods as he places the bear back to its original seating spot, in a very gentle manner.

He then turns to look at me, his lips tugging at the corner of his mouth as he gestures to the room, "Does it feel real yet?" he jokes.

I laugh as I too take in the room yet again, "No, it's...it's definitely still weird, knowing that in a handful of months there will be someone occupying this room".

He chuckles, "Your life changes completely once you bring your own little one into this world, they become...*everything*" he sighs heavily.

My face drops slightly, because I know he's thinking about his daughter, and how she probably had a room just like this, as he and his wife prepared to bring her into this world. I step towards the man slowly, as I reach out and place a gentle hand on his arm.

He doesn't look at me, but I talk anyways, "You know you're more than welcome here, anytime. Especially when the baby comes, they'll need a grandfather to look after them".

His head whips towards me when I say grandfather, his eyes widening slightly, "But-" his voice is low, and before he can speak anymore I shake my head at him, "Hopper, you were more of a father to me than my own. Mike and I *both* want you to be apart of our children's lives" I say gently.

My eyes gaze upon the man who nods his head slowly, and I can see that he's trying to hold back tears. He laughs low as he begins to stand, "Yeah well, someone's got to teach the kid about being on a ship, guess that falls to me" he jokes.

I smile brightly standing to my feet as well, heading towards the

doorway, "Yes, I think that would be perfect".

And with that, I lead Hopper back out into the hallway as I finish the tour.

The months continue to pass as winter has finally set in by late January. A soft blanket of snow settles across the town. Although I do not enjoy the lingering cold, I do love watching the snowflakes fall upon the rooftops as a silence settles across the land.

It was only a couple weeks ago that I was still able to see my feet. And then one morning, it was like they were completely hidden by my ever growing stomach.

Today, I stand in from of our floor length mirror, having begun to get ready for the day, when, out of the corner of my eye, my reflection causes me to stop and stare.

My underskirt and loose white blouse is all I have on currently, so it's fairly easy for me to lift my blouse and gaze upon my naked stomach.

I watch my reflection mimic my movements, as I raise my hand and move it slowly over my stomach. It amazes me everyday that there is a child resting within there, growing bigger everyday.

My heart sings everytime I feel the small fluttery movements within me, knowing that, indeed, there is a baby within me.

I think back to about a month ago when I first felt the tiny flutter as I was getting ready for bed. It startled me greatly, but after realizing exactly what was going on, I silently willed the baby to do it again. And as if they could hear me, they complied.

I just about dug Mike out of a deep sleep to try to make him feel the baby moving, however, it seemed our child found it funny to stop moving the second Mike got near my stomach.

At first, it was amusing, but, I could tell that Mike desperately wanted to feel our baby move. So, whenever I felt a small push I would find him immediately to try to have him feel the wonderful sensation.

But, alas, the baby continued to tease Mike relentlessly, and I was pretty sure he was close to giving up.

"What are you doing?" Mike's voice startles me back to reality, as he enters through our bedroom door, a teasing smile placed on his freckled face as he watches me.

I give a soft sigh, "Just being amazed by how much my stomach has grown, I don't know how much more it will go".

Mike chuckles as he moves towards me, wrapping his hands around my waist, resting his chin delicately on my shoulder, as he places a kiss on my cheek.

We both gaze out our reflections. I watch in the mirror as Mike moves his hands to caress my stomach, and I have to admit, it's one of the most amazing feelings in the world.

I hum in contentment as he does so. "Feel good" he jokes and I nod, "Yes, anytime you do this, I like it".

He laughs, nuzzling his face into mine as I turn to properly kiss him. When we part, our foreheads rest against one another.

After a moment, Mike speaks again, "Have you given any thoughts to names?" he asks.

I sigh, names had not been going so well, we just couldn't find one that we *both* liked. I shrug my shoulders, "I don't know, I still think Emmett is a good name", and I can tell Mike is holding back his disdain for that name.

"I like Elizabeth for a girl" he states, and I shake my head, "*Every* girl in Europe is named Elizabeth" I grumble.

Mike chuckles into my neck, "I guess our poor child will just have to be nameless". I giggle, "I guess so".

"We should just wait until we see them" I surmise looking down once again at my stomach. Mike follows my gaze as he rests a gentle hand on my skin.

"I still think it's a girl!" he says in a singsong voice. I roll my eyes teasingly at him, "Well I think it's a boy" I tease him back, in which we both laugh at each other, when suddenly Mike's eyes widen, as do mine, both our gazes finding each other.

"W-Was..was that?!" Mike's full attention is now on my stomach as he bends down to face it head on.

"There it is again!" he shouts joyously as his hands move along my stomach, caressing it. I give Mike an endearing look, knowing full well, he had finally felt our baby move.

"That's amazing" he breathes as his eyes can't leave my stomach, and I giggle lightly as he stands, our dark eyes meeting once again.

He shakes his head, "I can't believe we're going to be parents, I can't wait to meet her". I give him an incredulous look, "What makes you confirm that it's definitely a girl", I tease.

He gives me a look, "She kicked when I said I think she's a girl, she was confirming it" he states proudly.

I only laugh at him, "No, *he* kicked when I said it was a boy". Mike comes closer to me, "Well, we will have to see then" he moves in and places a soft kiss on my lips. When he pulls away, I can see a thought has crossed his mind.

"Hey, how about we have a little wager" his voice is testing, however, I find myself intrigued. "I'm listening" I state as I wait for Mike to continue.

"How about, if the baby's a girl, I get to pick her name, and if it's a boy, you get to choose" he suggests.

My breath catches in my throat slightly, unsure, because even though this would be a fun wager, I don't want either of us to resent our child's name.

I give him an unsteady gaze, "But, what if we hate the name the other chose".

He shakes his curly mop of black hair, "How about, if one of us *hates*

the name, then we will go through another, but whoever wins, gets to throw out the names?"

I ponder this option, and agree that it is better, so, I stand on my tiptoes and bring my lips up gently to Mike's, when I pull away he's giving me a look, "Deal, and it's been sealed with a kiss" I state, and Mike nods, "Agreed then". And before I can move, Mike pulls me to him once again, bringing our lips together in a sweeter and longer embrace, which turns hot and heavy within minutes. And I decide that it's a good thing I had not finished getting ready for the day.

As the days continue to pass, I notice that Hopper has come to visit us more often than not. His excuses to see us grow more and more bizarre as time passes too.

There's one particular circumstance when Max, Dustin, and Lucas decide to stop by that catches him by surprise, especially when Dustin answers the door.

"Hey, Captain Hopper, what are you doing here?" I listen from the living room as Dustin answers the door, and a knowing grin spreads across my face.

Lucas gives me a questioning look, Mike and Will exchange knowing looks as Max giggles from her seat, since I had filled her in on the blossoming romance between Hopper and Joyce on her last visit.

I lean closer to Lucas, so as to not be overheard, "Hopper's got a crush on Joyce, and ever since I introduced them he's come to stopping by the house every couple weeks ago, it's quite cute actually", and Lucas's eyes go wide upon hearing my explanation.

"Yeah, he keeps coming up with weird reasons to stop by, mostly to bring us stuff for the baby" Mike offers.

Lucas opens his mouth to speak, but Dustin leading Hopper into the house stops him. Hopper looks over to us, in which we all have knowing looks plastered on our faces. "What are you kids looking at?" he asks with a growl.

Max shakes her head, "Oh, nothing" she coos, Hopper looks as if he wants to say something, but decides to keep his mouth shut.

I turn to the older man, "So, what brings you by today, Hopper?" and now all of our eyes are on the man. He flusters slightly, "Oh...uhm...Joyce asked for some help last week with the cleaning the snow off the roof, told her I would stop by sometime" he shrugs.

We all know he's blatantly lying, but we decide to not press the matter any further and just nod our heads while he heads off towards the kitchen.

Dustin plops back down onto the couch, giving us all a weird look, "What was that all about?"

Max and I giggle as the boys shake their head. "Hopper's got a crush on Will's mom" Lucas teases as he nudges Will in the ribs. Said boy begins to blush, "Ugh, it's so weird" he admits.

"Wait! Our Captain Hopper's got a crush on Will's mom!?" Dustin exclaims as everyone nods their head.

"Yeah, it's really weird" Will barely says above a whisper as he brushes his long hair away from his face.

"But, I think it's really sweet too, I mean, how long has it been since Hopper's actually been in a relationship?" I argue.

The others shrug, because we all honestly have no clue. It's in that moment, when a sudden pressure is felt from inside my stomach startles me, "Oh!" I end up saying out loud as my hand comes up to touch my stomach.

"You okay?" Mike turns to me immediately, a worried expression written on his face. The others seem to be intrigued as well, each of them giving me a look as well.

I shake my head at them, "I'm fine, just the baby's getting stronger and each kick feels like he's going to burst out of my stomach" I chuckle.

Mike's face softens, "You mean she" he says jokingly and I give his

shoulder a light shove.

"Wow, that must be pretty cool" Dustin states as he looks at my engorged middle. I laugh, "It's weird, but it is interesting to feel" I admit.

"So, you think it's a boy, Mike a girl?" Max asks as we both whip our heads towards each other with a knowing grin.

"Yes, Mike won't back down" I give him a look and he chuckles, "No, I don't think *you* know when to back down".

The others laugh at our petty argument, "I say girl too" Will pipes in and I give him a glare. Max shakes her head, "No, definitely a boy, when my mom was pregnant with my little sister, she carried low and all around. El's carrying all out front" she comments.

I look to my stomach not really knowing what Max is talking about, all I know is that I can't wait to meet our little one. And having our friends nearby, visiting so often makes everything worth it.

Spring finally makes its appearance, as the snow slowly starts to melt away, revealing at first a muddy mess, which in eventually turns into deep green hills of new grass and budding flowers.

However, spring also means that the birth of Mike and mine's first child is quickly approaching. And within the last month, I grow steadily more tired and feel as if my stomach can't grow any larger.

The baby moves this way and that almost constantly, and for some reason he or she must be pressing on my bladder as if it were a new toy because I find myself having to go relieve myself what feels like every five seconds.

Mike had finished the crib a couple months ago and together we put the finishing touches on the baby's room. When we are done, the anticipation for their arrival only makes me more anxious.

May finally rolls around. The weather is warmer, while a crisp air lingers in the wind. Mike's mother and sisters along with Max and the boys were now making even more frequent visits to the house,

hoping that during one of their visits, the baby would finally make its arrival.

But, as May dragged on, the fear of never having the baby crept into my mind.

"This baby's never going to come" I finally voice my worry. Max, Nancy and I are sitting on the old stone wall that weaves its way through the hills.

I sit, not too comfortably, looking out to the sea, all of our long hair blowing in the wind. Nancy chuckles, "Don't worry El, the baby will come when it comes" she shrugs.

I let an infuriated huff, "Ugh, it needs to come *soon!*" I grumble as I place a hand on my very large stomach.

"You know, I heard having some fun in bed makes you go into labor" Max wiggles her eyebrows at me.

A blush crosses my face, but I roll my eyes all the same, "Max, I haven't felt like doing that for awhile now".

She and Nancy chuckle at my mirth. But, then Max gives me a tight side hug, "Don't worry, the little one will be here soon", and I only silently hope she is right.

Later that night as I lay in bed, while Mike finishes getting himself ready, I truly feel uncomfortable, as tight pains come across my back.

I let out a soft groan, and Mike turns towards me quickly, "You okay?" he asks approaching me.

I groan again, "Just, my back really hurts, and I'm uncomfortable too".

At this Mike moves, clamoring onto our bed, sitting behind me. His long legs stretch out to my side. I turn curiously towards him, "What-" I start, but Mike shushes me.

And then, he begins to slowly massage my back, and I immediately feel relief. I let out a long moan, and Mike chuckles, "Feel good?",

and I can almost feel his smile boring into my back, but I honestly don't care because what he's doing is making me ooze comfort.

"Yes...haven't felt this good...in a long time" I say as he kneads my back gently, allowing the pain to subside greatly.

"Well, it's the least I can do, I mean...you're doing all the work, I just helped a little bit" he tries to joke, and I laugh softly, "Yeah, this is definitely a job" I sigh as I rub my stomach.

"I just want them to get here already". Mike hums in agreement behind me, "It'll be soon" he says softly as he continues to press on my back.

He continues to massage me for awhile, a silence hanging between us. When, Max's words from earlier pop into my head, "You know" I start, "Max said sex could put me into labor" I giggle.

Mike laughs from behind me, "You seem too uncomfortable for that" he states as he places a gentle kiss on my neck.

"There will be time for that after" he offers, his voice teasing. I laugh, "Man, after nine months of this I'm not sure if I'll let you near me again".

Mike's fingers stop, and I turn towards him, he looks thoroughly shocked, and I can't help but bark out in laughter, "Mike, I'm teasing!", and I bend over with laughter when his face drops and a look of relief crosses his face.

"Oh...thought you were serious there for a moment" he breathes. I recover slightly from my laughter turning to look at him, our dark eyes searching the others.

I reach out and gently caress his soft face, "I hate that we haven't been intimate for awhile, I miss that" I admit, and Mike nods slowly. "Yeah, let's hope it takes us awhile to have another like it did with this one", he reaches out and rubs my stomach.

I hum in agreement as he continues to rub my stomach, I turn my head once again, and our faces are only inches apart. His heavy lidded eyes speak volumes, so, I lean in and capture his lips between

mine, Mike not holding back either.

As our kiss deepens and begins to feel fueled, I turn my body fully towards his as our lips crash together in a moment of passion. My back pain totally forgotten as we lose ourselves within one another, giving into Max's advice.

And, apparently the redhead's advice works, because not a couple hours later do I feel the constant nagging that my bladder is about to burst. However, when I stand, I feel a warm gush of water from between my legs.

A not so silent gasp escapes my lips as I watch the water rain down to the wooden floor, and I know that my water has just broken.

I turn to look back at Mike whose still fast asleep, I move to shake him, "Mike, Mike, wake up!" I move him back and forth and he stirs. "Hmmm" he moans as he rolls around in the sheets to face me.

I know he is barely awake as he blinks sleepily at me, I let out an exasperated sigh, "Mike, my water broke!" I say firmly, waiting for him to react.

It takes a minute for my words to sink into his mind, as he continues to look at me, blinking. But, as if he's been struck by lightning he sits up quickly, "Your water broke, the baby's coming!?" he cries.

I nod my head at him, "Yes, it just broke, and I don't know what's supposed to happen next" I state, starting to feel a little nervous, because no one had explained to me exactly what happens after my water breaks. All I know is that once it breaks, it means the baby is on its way.

"Could you go grab Joyce? She'll know what to do" I state as I move gently back onto the bed holding my stomach as if it was going to drop away from me.

Mike nods wildly jumping up from the bed, throwing on his pants and night shirt as he races out the door.

I wait for a bit, when I feel a sharp, tight pain shoot from my back

and tight around my stomach. My face scrunches as the pain continues, and I try to breathe, okay, this was *much* more painful than I had thought.

Eventually, the pain subsides slightly, just as Joyce and Mike clamber through our bedroom door, both of their hair wild from sleep.

Joyce approaches me, and gives me a soft look, "Hey sweetie, Mike said your water broke?" she says gently and I nod, "Yes, just a couple minutes ago, and I just got a shooting pain through my back and stomach" I say.

Joyce gives me a small smile and look, "That's a contraction, it means the baby is trying to make its way out".

I grimace, "It hurts" I state blandly, and Joyce laughs lightly, "Yes, it does, and you'll keep having them until the baby is here" she shrugs.

"How long will that be?" I ask, uncertainty written across my face. Joyce looks between me, and then Mike, her mouth open, "Uhm...well that depends, could be a couple of hours, a day or two".

"A day or two!" flies out of my mouth faster than I can process what she just told me. I fall back onto our mound of pillows and groan.

Joyce reaches forward and tucks a stray hair behind my ear. "Don't worry, we'll all be here to help, you'll know when you get close when the contractions get closer and you feel like you need to push" she explains.

I go to nod, but another tight pain rips across me and I moan slightly. Mike is up and in our bed in seconds, moving towards me, "You okay, do you need anything?" he asks, looking concerned.

I shake my head 'no', and he drops his shoulders, still looking concerned.

"Well, since you've just started, it'll give us time to get ready" Joyce says as she stands. "I'm going to get some old sheets and towels to lay on the bed, and water and blankets for the delivery" she states as she begins to move out of the room once again.

She stops at the door, "Mike, just make sure she's comfortable, okay?" Mike nods quickly as Joyce leaves, and I rest back against the pillow.

Mike gives me a look, "Well, I guess Max's advice was right" he tries to joke. I give him a glare, just as another contraction hits me, and my body contorts. "Right, sorry, probably shouldn't be joking" he states lamely as he tries to comfort me.

I only try to breathe through the pain as I await Joyce's return.

It's late morning as the sun begins to draw in through the window in our bedroom, and I feel as if I'm about to die as I try to work through the pain that rips through me every couple of minutes.

I groan out in displeasure every time a contraction hits, as Mike lays beside me, mopping my very sweaty brow.

And our room begins to feel too full as Nancy, Karen and Max have also joined us. The boys have yet to make their way upstairs, and I'm pretty sure my cries in anguish keep them away. Yet, Karen made them busy by heading into town to fetch the doctor, in which we are all eagerly awaiting.

Joyce has prepared Mike's and mine's bed so that it will not be a mess after I deliver the baby. While piles of towels and buckets of water remain at the ready when the baby comes.

Another rippling pain courses through me, and I can't help but cry out in pain this time. It seems to startle Mike, but he remains by my side throughout every contraction. Even though I would love to murder him for putting me into this situation, I can't help but also feel lucky to have him by me the whole time.

"Do you need anything to drink?" Mike asks softly as he pats my head once again. "Sure" I whisper out in exhaustion as the last contraction fades and I lay back onto our pillows.

Since the baby decided to make itself known in the wee hours of the morning, my eyes grow heavy with sleep, but anytime I go to rest, a contraction makes it impossible to do so.

Mike moves to the bed and holds out a glass of water to me, I take a couple tentative sips and hand the glass back to him.

Just then, our bedroom door opens once again, and Dr. Rivers steps through. He gives me a soft look as he approaches me with his bag.

"Ah, Mrs. Wheeler, seems the baby is on its way" he states, and I just about punch him for his easy going attitude, but I refrain, gritting my teeth as I speak, "Yes, definitely ready to come".

He nods as he comes close, as he raises the bedsheet, "May I check?" he gives me a look and I nod.

So, Dr. Rivers does a quick examination and looks back to me nodding, "Yep, won't be long now, you're almost dilated, and the baby's head is exactly where it needs to be, just keep letting your body do what it needs to" he states as he rises to wash his hands.

I groan, wishing for the baby to be out *now* and not later. "Try to get some rest if you can" he says over his shoulder from the washing basin.

Again, I want to smack him or something, but instead I try to lay back and relax. As I feel Mike's hand move across my stomach, and I sigh at the contact, because for some reason, it actually feels really good, and it lulls me into a light sleep.

The sleep doesn't last too long, as I'm awakened by the worst pain I have yet to feel, and I shoot up, crying in pain, all eyes are on me now.

"El, are you okay!?" Mike's presence is right next to me, as I feel a weird sensation go through my body, "I...I think it's time" I cry out, as the pain doesn't stop like it had throughout the rest of the time I've been in labor.

My eyes catch Joyce's and she's gone immediately to fetch the doctor. Nancy moves quickly so that she is on my right side, mimicking Mike as she rubs at my back trying to soothe me.

Karen approaches as well, gently rubbing my legs, "Don't worry dear, it'll be over soon, the first birth is always the most painful, it gets

easier over time, trust me".

Karen's words hit me, but right now I'm too focused on the pain that is constantly nagging at me. I cry out again, just as Dr. Rivers comes through the room, "Yes, seems like she is ready", he says as he approaches.

"Have her come closer to the end of the bed" he states, and Mike and Nancy work together to move me.

Mike then sits behind me, giving me something to rest on, as he places a gentle kiss to the side of my sweaty head, "You're doing so good, El" he praises and I raise my legs, which then become supported by Nancy and Karen.

Dr. Rivers moves so that he is right in front of me, and he nods, "There's the head, it's definitely time, El, try giving a push" he states.

And just as another contraction hits me, I close my eyes and push as hard as I can, wishing the pain to go away, and for Mike and I to meet our baby.

"Good dear, now rest for a second" Dr. River gently guides me, as I can begin to feel the baby's head, which is by far the weirdest thing I had felt in my life.

I stop at his direction taking in some deep breaths before he says, "Alright, again, push!" he states and I bare down with all my might, as I begin to feel the pressure release within me.

Again, I stop take in a couple more breaths, as everyone around me cheers, "One more!" Dr. River's cries, and I give all of my last bit of energy as I push, I'm pretty sure I'm cutting off the circulation in Mike's hands as I use him for leverage, as I cry out.

And then, it's gone, the pressure, the pressing pain, and I freeze, my head turning up ever so slightly as I watch as Dr. Rivers pulls the baby from me, and brings it up and over my gown.

It's like everything is in slow motion as I watch Dr. Rivers hit the baby's back slightly, and in which, our baby lets out a low cry, and my heart melts right there.

He brings the baby up, and into my awaiting arms, and there, I'm finally holding our first sweet baby.

Tears prick at my eyes as I gaze down upon our baby, I begin to wipe away the blood and other fluids surrounding the baby's face, which contorts lightly as they begin to cry.

I look over my shoulder and see Mike is crying as well, as he looks down to our child, he reaches out in awe, gently caressing the baby's chin.

"Perfect" is all he says, as our eyes meet and we share a watery grin.

"Oh, my look at them!" Karen cries as she looks upon our new family. I bend down and give the baby a quick kiss, as they wriggle in my arms.

"What is it?" Nancy asks from the side as she looks upon the new baby.

Totally forgetting about that part, I lift the blanket wrapped around the baby and look down, as does Mike. And I can't help but give him a winning smirk over my shoulder, which he catches, as he rolls his eyes, but smiles all the same.

I turn my head up at everyone, giving the brightest smile I can muster before I say, "It's a boy".

The next few hours seem to trickle by ever so slowly, but in a way that's comfortable as Mike and I bask in the glory of our new baby boy.

I'm laying back in our bed, Mike cozied right up next to me, as he holds our sweet child.

Shortly after delivering the baby, Dr. Rivers instructed that I'd have to deliver the placenta next, which was nothing compared to delivering our new son.

Once I was all cleaned up, Dr. Rivers checked over the baby, weighed him, and cleared him with a clean bill of health.

After, Joyce helped me change along with our bed, and now, we were left alone for awhile to just be with our new son.

He's sleeping heavily, his arm twitching here and there as he lays swaddled comfortably in Mike's arms.

I reach out and gently brush my fingers against his cheek in a soothing motion, still not believing he is finally here.

"I can't believe we have a son" Mike finally speaks, not taking his eyes off of the baby. I hum in agreement, honestly not believing it either.

I move my hand and brush back our sons fairly thick black hair, "Well, he's got your hair" I coo. Mike chuckles, adjusting his grip slightly, "Yeah, but he's got your nose, and ears" he points out.

A giggle erupts from me, as I shake my head, "Honestly, he's the spitting image of you" I argue as I look down at our son, noting how much he looks like his father.

"But that's okay, it means he'll be just as handsome" I say as I continue to admire our new baby. Mike lets out a light laugh, "I can only hope" he jokes.

And he finally turns his gaze away from the baby, and turns to look at me, our eyes meet. And written on his face is something that made me fall madly in love with him: admiration.

He gives me a soft look, "You are amazing" he breathes and I duck my head slightly. He nudges my shoulder for me to look back at him, "No, you really are El, I mean, you carried him for months, and spent hours in pain just to get him here. I can't thank you enough" his voice is deep, and I can feel the tears welling in my eyes.

"Mike" I say softly and he leans forward and captures my lips in his. It's gentle and full of so much, that I allow the tears to fall. When he pulls away, his eyes capture mine, "I love you, always and forever" he whispers.

And I give him a winning smile, "And I love you too..and this little guy" I say sweetly reaching out to him again, and without hesitation, as I place my finger into his whole fist, he gently closes his small

fingers around mine, and my heart melts.

"He needs a name" Mike states, looking back down to our boy, and at this I grin even wider, "Yes, and as per agreement.." I begin to singsong, and Mike rolls his eyes, "Yeah, I haven't forgotten" he mumbles.

I look back down to our dark haired boy and hum softly, and not that I've actually looked at him, a name pops into my mind.

"I...actually thought of a different name, now that I've seen him" my voice is low and Mike turns his head towards me giving me a curious look, "Oh yeah?" he inquires

I nod my head in return, "Yeah, and I think you'll like it" my mouth quirks up into a smile.

Mike looks at me, waiting, "So, what is it?" he asks with anticipation laced in his voice.

I brush back our sons hair once again, and state the full name I had in mind to Mike, who continues to watch our baby sleep, as he registers the name.

"Do you like it?" I ask hesitantly, and when Mike's gaze falls upon me once again, his mouth is turned up into a brilliant grin, "It's perfect" is all he says.

My heart beats quickly as we beam at one another, turning our eyes once again to our little boy.

An hour or so later, and Mike and I have dozed in and out of consciousness with our son, when a soft knock alerts us.

Both of our heads flip to the door, where I see Joyce peeking through, "Hey" she says ever so quietly, "You up for some visitors?" she inquires.

I move up in the bed, as Mike readjusts too, handing the baby to me, who whimpers slightly at the change of hands, but quickly settles down.

"Yes, of course, everyone can come in" I say. Joyce smiles excitedly as she gestures for everyone to be quiet and to enter the room.

Moments later, Nancy and Karen enter, with Holly bounding quickly towards us, with Max, Lucas, Will and Dustin following closely by. And, to my surprise, Hopper shuffles into the room.

And within seconds we are surrounded by our nearest and dearest family and friends. I move so everyone can get a good look at our son, "Hi everyone", I say in a soft voice as I pick up our sons arm and wave it casually.

Everyone coos and awes at our little one, and I can't help but fill with joy.

Holly comes closest to the bed, "Can I hold him?" she asks in her still young child's voice, everyone laughs around her.

"How about you sit in the rocking chair and I'll bring him to you?", the young girl nods wildly as she pushes everyone out of her way, and she finds herself rocking in the chair.

Mike helps me from out of the bed, as I ease my still very sore body off of the mattress. I stand and bring our bundle towards Holly. Mike is right on my tail as he instructs Holly the exact way to hold him.

"Alright, make sure you support his head, yeah...just like that, and put your other hand there...and good, you've got him" he says with nervousness as he backs slowly away from Holly and the small girl ogles at him.

Everyone else moves, as our sons face is much easier to see now.

"Oh, look at him! He's precious!" Karen gushes as she watches her youngest hold her new grandson.

"He looks just like Mike" Nancy chirps in, and I turn to give my husband a knowing look, "See, told you".

He just shrugs his shoulders, while Dustin speaks, "Poor kid" he jokes, and everyone laughs while Mike smacks him across the head.

"He does have quite a head of hair" Will says quietly as he looks upon the baby. "He has El's nose and ears though" Mike points towards the small child and Joyce peaks over, smiling, "Yes, he definitely does", she agrees, and I can feel my face flush slightly.

Hopper moves to get a better look, "So, this is what a little Wheeler looks like" he chuckles, and everyone again laughs gently, and I know Mike and I are both flushing at these words.

"He's so small, and adorable!" Max gushes as she moves to brush our son's hair with her hand.

We all nod in agreement as we continue to watch Holly rock the new baby. She finally looks to Mike and I, "What's his name?"

And now everyone's eyes are on us. "Yeah, El won the bet, what did you choose?" Max smiles wildly in my direction.

Mike moves to tuck his hand around my waist pulling me close, "Yes, El did win, but I love the name she picked" he says honestly.

"So, whaddya name him then?" Hopper quips, showing impatience.

Mike nods to me, allowing to share his name with the people who we know will love our son just as much as they love us, I open my mouth to speak, "Well, I chose a name to represent two people in my life that have meant the world to me", I start, and everyone is leaning in, awaiting to hear his name.

"So, our little boy's name is James Michael Wheeler, but his nickname will be 'Jaimy'. Named after the man who was like a father to me, and, my wonderful husband who gave me the greatest gift in life: love".

Everyone coos at my little story, and I shyly move my eyes towards Hopper, who's looking at me, awestruck.

"Well, what do you think?" I ask him genuinely, and the man only shakes his head in surprise.

"Uhm...well, I guess it works" he shrugs his shoulder nonchalantly, but I can see the smile tugging at his lips as he looks back down to

Jaimy.

I move to stand in front of Holly, "Can I take him?" I ask her gently, in which she smiles, handing him over, as I pass him over to Hopper, who pulls back.

"Whoa, there kid-" he starts but I continue to press Jaimy towards him, "Come on Hopper, just for a minute" I start, and Hopper finally stops moving back, he lets out a long sigh, holding out his hands and allowing me to place him in his arms.

We all watch as Hopper moves, holding the baby within his arms. "Well, he is the tiny little guy, ain't he?" he quips.

"You sure about the name?" he throws a look at Mike and I, and we both nod in agreement. "It fits him perfectly" Mike states.

Hopper's mouth grows into a larger grin, "Alright then, little Jaimy".

Night begins to fall on the long day, and I feel myself growing tired. After passing Jaimy around and letting everyone hold him, our friends and family bid us a good night, each offering to help out throughout the night if need be.

As much as I'd love the offer, Jaimy seems to enjoy feeding quite often, so I know I can't go very far.

Within the first day, he shows to be an easy baby. For, he had only cried out if he needed to be changed, or fed. Other than that, he seems to be easily soothed, which I'm thankful for.

Mike shooed me to bed as I finished feeding Jaimy, and he in turn changes the boys diaper, and lulls him back to sleep.

Mike then moves so that I can look at our new son once again, something I'm pretty sure I'll never get used to.

I sigh, "I can't believe we made him" I say softly, and Mike hums in agreement, "He is perfect, that's for sure".

So, we settle down together in our bed, our new little family snuggled

against one another as the moon from the window gently beams in.

I rest my head against Mike's as my eyelids grow heavy, "I love you" I whisper, and plant a gentle kiss on his head, and then bend down to Jaimy's.

Mike moves and mimics my actions, "I love you too" he says gently. And I begin to feel sleep pull at me, but not before setting my eyes one more time on Mike and Jaimy, my heart feeling complete, and in utter love with these two boys. Not knowing how I got so lucky. When finally, I drift off to sleep.

And...it's done! So, what did you guys think of this last chapter?! I'm so sorry it took so long to get out and done. I've currently started full time at my internship and I'm SWAMPED! But, I wanted to get this done, and now it is!

I will be getting the Epilogue up hopefully soon, because it will be short. And then I will be focusing all my time on Watching Her Fall In Love, which I have also been neglecting because I wanted to finish this up!

So, thank you to all who have given reviews that always make my heart melt and sticking along on this adventure with me! It was a really fun story to write and I hope you all enjoyed it too!

So, let me know what you think! Especially if you liked the baby's name! I've had that planned for a LONG time! So glad I was finally able to write it!

Till the epilogue! Thank you!

45. Epilogue

So, here it is the final chapter and epilogue to my longest fanfiction yet. It's crazy that I began writing this a year ago thinking that it would be a quick story, but here it is in all of its 45 chapter glory!

I want to thank all of my amazing fans and reviewers who have trudged along with me throughout writing this fic! I've loved the ideas and all the encouragement and love, it's what made this story so worth writing!

This chapter isn't as long since it is the epilogue, but I hope you enjoy the ending!

And thank you always for the wonderful reviews!

By the way did anyone else squeal with excitement for the new trailer! I just about died! Looks amazing and like there will be a lot of Mileven going on as well! July 4th can't come soon enough!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things or Bloody Jack

Epilogue

10 years later...

Waves crash evenly into the eroding cliff, water splashes high into the air, cascading down onto the nearby rocks, darkening them.

The salty sea air whisps through the seagrass that dance and bend to its whim. While the calling of flying gulls echo across the blue bird sky.

While down below on the rocky cliffs, where the seagrass rolls, a small cheerful yell is heard.

"Come on Clara, we're going to miss them!" a young boy with shaggy black hair calls into the wind behind him. His face red with exertion as he tramples over the seagrass, parting it like a ship cuts through

the waves.

"Jaimy, wait for me!" a smaller girl, with wild, curly black hair cries to her brother. Her legs quite smaller than the boy who runs ahead, as she continues to get snagged in the long grass.

She's able to make a couple more leaps before her legs become ensnared once again, and she topples to the ground with an 'oomph!'

The air escapes her lungs in one breath, and she feels the tears begin to prick at her eyes as she attempts to push herself from the ground, but her long hair blocks her view, and she can feel the panic begin to set in.

But, before she can even cry out, she feels a pair of strong hands wrap around her midsection, as she's lifted from the grass. She takes in a sudden gasp of air as she begins to turn in the person's arms. Her warm, dark brown eyes meet a mirror, as if her eyes are reflected back to her.

"Woah there sweetie, you've got to be more careful, that seagrass can really trip you up" the voice is deep, but warm, and the small girl allows a smile to pull at her mouth as she wraps her arms around the man who holds her.

Her dark hair meshes with his as she wraps her small arms around him, giving him a tight squeeze. "Thanks for rescuing me, daddy" she giggles as she pulls away. The man gives her a warm look as he shifts her on his waist.

He moves to push her cascading locks from her face, so that he can see the smattering of freckles, just like his own on her soft face. He can't help but grin as he bends and plants a small kiss on her nose.

"Anything for you, Clara" he singsongs. A look comes across her face, "Anything?" she catches his words, and the man feels as if he's been caught in a trap, '*she's just like her mother*', races through his head.

He lets out a long breath for nodding, "Why, what did you have in mind?" he asks his smirking daughter, she then begins to move in his arms, and he knows exactly what she wants as he helps her climb

onto his back. Her arms wrapped tightly around his neck, and her small legs tucked into his waist, he moves his arms so that he can hold her safely.

"Okay, now go after Jaimy!" she cries, moving her hand just enough to point to where the growing boy is still running through the seagrass. The man watches his oldest son, who, even though seems to have gotten his impending height, is still struggling to make it through the grass.

The man turns to look at his daughter, whose eyes are full of wild excitement as she watches her brother attempt to cut through the grass. He sighs, "What about mommy?" he asks her.

And before he can speak another word, a soft voice comes from behind, "Don't worry about mommy, she and Georgie will catch up".

The man turns to see his wife, whose gait seems determined as she moves through the grass as if it's the easiest thing on earth. She has a proud and wicked look upon her face, as her light brown hair moves in the wind. The man's not sure if he's seen anything so beautiful as he stops and stares at his wife, who's also carrying their youngest on her hip.

He must've been staring, and not going anywhere because he feels a tight pull on his head, causing him to wince as his daughter pulls at his hair. "Daddy, we're going to lose!" the small girl cries.

He can hear his wife chuckling as she meets them. "Go on Mike, catch up with Jaimy, I think Georgie and I can make it through just find", she beams at him.

Mike gives the woman a soft look, and she tilts her head, "What?" she whispers softly coming to stand beside her husband. He shakes his head at her, "You're just the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, my lovely El" he coos.

El blushes deeply ducking her head away from her husband. They had known each other for over twenty years, however, the way he complimented her always made her feel like her teenage self when their love first struck.

She moves, and places a delicate hand on Mike's cheek as she moves forward and gives him a soft, lingering kiss. They both hear their children groan in disgust, which makes them both smile.

"Ew, don't do that" Clara hides her face into Mike's shoulder trying to avert her eyes from her parents displays of affection.

Both Mike and El laugh, as Mike adjusts Clara on his back, as she scoots up further. El nods ahead, "Go on, catch up" she grins, and she watches as both her husband and only daughter give her identical smiles, and she's pretty sure her heart melts.

"Alright miss Clara, you ready?" he spins in place slightly, causing the young girl to squeal with glee, "Yes!" she cheers.

And then, Mike is off, trampling through the grass as if he were a wild stallion, their daughter holding on for dear life.

El's motherly instincts kick in as she can't help but shout after them, "Do be careful!" But, she's pretty sure her words are lost to the wind as she can hear Mike and Clara's laughter ringing throughout the field.

She shakes her head watching them run off, when she feels a soft tug at her side. Her attention is immediately drawn to her youngest child in her arms. Georgie looks up at her, he's their only child that inherited her light brown hair, her soft brown eyes and olive skin. He also has the fewest freckles of his siblings as well.

Mike always gently calls him, her mini-me, where Jaimy and Clara's features much more resembles Mike's.

"Mama" his young voice reaches up to El, and she can't help but smile, "Yes, little one" she coos to him. The young boys eyes brighten as he gestures towards where the rest of their little family has taken off to, "Follow" he says giggling.

He turns his head back up towards El, and their soft eyes meet, she gives her son a curious look, as he tilts his head, evaluating El's expression.

"Follow" he says again, as he attempts to lean forward and El has to

holdfast to him before he topples out of her arms. "Woah, you want to go after them?" she says snuggling up against her son.

"Yes, chase!" he squeals and El gets the gist of what he's saying. It seems that each of their children have bold personalities, not afraid to tackle anything in their way to get to what they want.

She sighs, as she moves her young son around, adjusting him as Mike had done with Clara. However, since he was only three, El holds on much more tightly to make sure he is secure.

"Ready?" she gives her son a look, and he only screeches joyously, making her wince slightly before she takes off, developing a steady gait through the winding grass.

She can feel her heart pounding against her chest as she attempts to be quick, but careful as she navigates through the seagrass. Her motherly instincts reminding her that she does not want to fall with her youngest perched on her back.

But, the sound of Georgie's cries of delight, make her tuck that little voice away, because just as her children are strong, she reminds herself that she is too.

El arrives at the edge of the seagrass where the rest of her family lay, spread eagle, catching their breaths. As she exits from the ocean of seagrass, she can feel herself catching her breath as well, setting Georgie down, whose face is filled with delight as he toddles towards his family.

El sits with her dress tucked beneath her as she sits close to Jaimy, she reaches out to brush his unruly hair from his sweaty face. "Tired?" she quips to him.

The growing boy throws a hand at her, "No...all....good" he pants between breaths. At this Clara sits up to look at El, "Mommy, daddy was *this* close to beating Jaimy" she says as she holds up two fingers, almost being pinched together to show how close they came to winning.

El gives her daughter a warm look, "Oh, really?" she turns her gaze towards her husband, who seems completely wiped from the race.

Mike peeks one of his eyes open, as he attempts to speak, but no words come out. El can only laugh as she waits for her family to get the rest they need.

A couple minutes later, Mike finally sits up with a huff, and looks at his family, "Alright, we're already running a little late, we've got to get to the pier to meet the others" he states.

At his words, his children sit up as fast as lightning, "No, we don't want to be late!" Clara cries, giving her parents her pouting face. At this Mike gives El a look, as she rolls her eyes, "It's not like I taught her that look" she says through her teeth.

"Whatever you say" he chuckles as he raises to his feet, reaching out a hand to help up his wife. He pulls a little bit more harder than she expected, and she ends up in his arms.

"Hi", he whispers, his eyes boring into hers. She gives him a gentle look, "Hi" she says back. They move into kiss, and seconds before their lips meet, a loud mocking, "Ewwww!" is heard from behind them.

They both turn, to look at their kids, each with looks of disgust, "Not again" Georgie whines hiding his eyes behind his hands. While Jaimy pretends to vomit and Clara looks away.

Both adults came help but chuckle at their kids, and settle on a light kiss, before breaking apart. Mike moves towards Jaimy, ruffling his hair, "Alright, let's get going" he says, as Clara runs to his side and entwines her hand in his.

El shakes her head at the two, knowing that the second she was born, six years ago, she had Mike wrapped around her finger.

She moves to pick up Georgie, who is already holding up his arms, awaiting for his mother to pick him up.

"Come on Georgie" she grunts as she picks up the not so little boy, and he adjusts himself just so that El can carry him easily. She moves

so that she is beside Mike, who takes her free hand and entwines it with his.

Jaimy is already making his way into the town, "Come on, slowpokes!" he calls over his shoulders and at this Clara pulls on Mike, causing them all to stumble slightly before meeting a matchable gait together, "Yes, let's go!" she cries and soon they are all off into town.

They wind their way through the busy streets of London, as they make their way towards the docks.

Jaimy has come to follow alongside the rest of the family so as to not get separated by the crowd. "How much further?" he asks impatiently.

El casts her son a look before saying, "It's not much further, it's one of the furthest docks down" she hums, as Clara now pulls at her hand. She and Mike having switched children awhile ago to give herself a rest from carrying their growing boy.

"It's been so long" Clara drawls as she looks about with her dark eyes. Mike nods in agreement, "Yes, just over a year" he states.

El looks ahead as the crowd finally starts to disperse, and up ahead there's a familiar red color that catches her eyes, a smile pulls at her lips.

"Look, there they are!" she points ahead and now all of the Wheeler's family's eyes are straight forward, as they land on where she's pointing.

Clara pulls harder, "Auntie Max!" she cries and El allows her daughter to run the rest of the way, as Max's head swivels from where the little voice cried her name.

A beaming smile crosses the redhead's face as she sees the only daughter of her best friend come running her way. Max bends down, holding open her arms so that the dark haired girl can be enveloped into her arms.

"Oh, Clara, it's so good to see you!" she coos as she spins the girl

around. The female Wheeler giggles in delight.

"We've missed you" she says in her small child's voice, and Max gives her a small kiss on her head, "It's only been a month, we always try to meet up as much as possible" she states as she places the girl back down, just as the rest of the Wheeler family catches up.

A familiar curly haired man moves forward, "Well, aren't you guys a sight for sore eyes" he greets them, as their families come together. Dustin moves to give El a hug, as Max turns to Mike to give him a squeeze as well.

"It's good to see you guys where the gi-" Mike starts to ask, when a flash of red moves towards them.

"Auntie El, Uncle Mike!" A group of three redheaded girls move towards the Wheeler family.

The oldest moves to hug El, "Hello, Grace, how are you?" El squeezes the eldest of the Henderson family. Grace pulls back slowly, her long red-brown hair knotted back perfectly, as her blue eyes sparkle up to El. "I'm good, but it's been kinda boring without you guys around" she hums. El brushes a stray strand of hair behind the girls ear, "Well, I know *someone*, missed you" she whispers into the girls ear as she motions to her oldest son. Everyone knowing that he had quite the crush on the girl since they were young children.

Grace follows El's nod and a blush spreads across her cheeks as Jaimy stands off to the side, not seeming all to interested in the interaction. But, the girl, who's only a year younger than Jaimy moves towards him.

"Hello, Jaimy" she greets shyly, and the boy's face lights up brilliantly, "Uh...Hi Gracie" he says quietly, while the rest of the family watches on in awe.

Mike hoists the two younger, twin girls up into his arms. "Ella, Rosie, how are you two doing?" he greets the girls. The youngest of the Henderson family are identical down to the last freckle that spreads across their fair skin. While their redder hair than their sister gleams in the afternoon sun. Both girls giggle as they hug onto Mike, "We're

good!" they answer together.

El then moves to hug the two girls, while Dustin hoists Georgie into the air, "My, my, have you gotten bigger?" he jokes, as the small boy giggles as Dustin bounces him up and down in the air.

"Yes, much bigger!" he cries as his face becomes red with squeals. Dustin eventually stops and holds the boy on his hip.

El finally moves to Max, and gives her a tight hug, "How are you doing, holding up I mean?" she then gestures to Max's once again slightly protruding stomach.

Max heaves a heavy sigh, "Oh, you know the usual, tired all the time, achy, hoping this is the last one" she says the last part through gritted teeth.

The other adults laugh, as Dustin moves to caress his wife's stomach, "Yeah, maybe this one will be a boy" he sighs.

"Watch, you'll get two girls again" Mike laughs, and Dustin face falls, "Don't even joke about that", and the others join in on the laughter.

Max gestures to El, "So, any news to share?" she asks with a wink. El shakes her head, "No, and that's okay, three's quite a lot" she stresses. Max nods her head, "I agree, but...can't keep this one away" Max whispers into El's ear, who has to cover her mouth to hide her laughter.

"Oh, don't I know it" El agrees as she gestures towards her husband who is engaged in a conversation with her husband as the children talk amongst themselves.

El moves to speak to Max once again, but a distant voice stops her, "Hey, who said you could start the party without us?"

All of their heads swivel to a waving figure, who's other hand is held tightly with a woman's as they make their way down into the ship's yard.

"Lucas!" El and Max cry at the same time as the man moves to hug the girls. Once they break away, they turn their attention to Lucas's

wife. "Amara, how are you?" Max coos as she gives the woman a hug, El doing the same.

"Oh, you know, taking care of this little guy, and waiting on the next" she says as she gestures down towards Lucas's and hers son.

El bends to the four year olds height, "Hello, Oliver, how are you doing" the young boy hides slightly behind his mother, as he places a free hand into his mouth. His dark eyes looking into hers shyly, "Good" he mumbles, and his mother scoffs.

"This one, so shy, hopefully this next one will help him break out of his shell" Amara sighs, patting her much larger stomach than Max's.

"Well, we can't wait to meet him or her" El grins brightly gesturing to her stomach.

"Mom!" El whips her head quickly around, knowing her oldest child's voice anywhere, she immediately believes he's in trouble, however, she sees a bright smile on his face instead, as he points out towards the ocean, "There they are!"

El's eyes follow her sons pointing finger, and *there*, just barely skimming the edge of the horizon is a familiar ship that is sailing straight in their direction.

She walks with purpose, meeting her family at the edge of the docks. Mike comes to stand by her side, linking their hands together, as her children stand in front of them, their eyes cast out, gazing upon the bright blue water of the ocean.

A tear silently trickles from her eye, as she turns to look at Mike, who's giving her a soft look. "They're home", is all she says as they wait patiently for the ship to dock.

They wait on baited breath as the ship continues to sail smoothly into the harbor. Everyone is anxiously awaiting those who are aboard the vessel.

And then, the ship can be seen in full glory, the sails flapping against the smooth wind, as the people aboard are actually coming into view

as they move about to steadily steer the vessel into docking.

El can feel her heart pounding against her ribcage, because she can finally hear them now, as one person bends over the side, waving foolishly towards them, "Hey! Long time no see!" the voice just barely meets their ears as they all begin to wave the ship in.

The tears are coming heavier now from El's eyes as she tries to hold back the sobs as her eyes are set on the man who is practically her brother, "Will!" she cries, "It's so good to see you!" she tries to stretch her voice as far as it will go to reach them.

Another figure appears at Will's side, "Hello, everyone!" a woman's voice cuts through the wind, and El's pretty sure she's gushing now, as she can taste the salty tears permeate her mouth.

"Joyce!" El cries out, again, her heart feeling full once again, now that her family is back from their year long journey.

"Grandpa!" El turns her head down to her daughter who has just called out, and she follows her pointed finger towards the front of the boat, and there, in all of his glory, is Hopper, he waves quickly to them all, but puts his attention into barking out orders to make sure the ship lands safely.

They all watch in awe as the glorious *Hawk*, cuts through the gentle shore waves, as Hopper and his crew lead it into their dock.

El marvels at the ship, for her, and the boys, it held something special to all of them, and seeing it once again, it makes all of their hearts swell.

Everyone bounces eagerly on their feet as they allow the ship to settle, and a gangplank is put out. El gazes upon the ship, until Joyce finally makes her way down it in a hurry.

She doesn't even feel her feet move until she knows that she's getting closer to Joyce, and she can see the older woman crying just as she is, and when they meet in the middle, they embrace in a tight hug.

El sobs into the older woman's chest, feeling the warmth and safety she's felt for all the years that Joyce treated her just like her own

daughter.

She can feel Joyce's breath in her ear, "Shh, don't worry sweetie, I'm here, we're back" she tries to calm the younger girl.

El pulls back, a watery smile greeting the older woman, she moves to wipe the tears from her eyes, "I know...it was just hard having you all gone for a year" she sniffles.

Joyce chuckles lightly, "Oh I know, even having Hopper, Will and Anna aboard, I hated being away from all of you", she then gestures behind the girl, who turns to see the rest of her family and friends hurrying towards them.

Clara, of course is in the lead, "Grandma!" the dark haired girl all put jumps into the older woman's arms who catches her with glee, "Oh, Clara, look at you, you're just as beautiful as your mother!" she brushes the girl's wild locks behind her ear, who giggles in delight.

Just then El's eyes catch a couple more figures moving towards them, and she can't help but smile, moving towards Will's open arms, embracing each other tightly.

"Missed you" El states her breath on Will's neck. "Missed you too" he says, pulling away as he moves to hug the others who have also made their way across the gangplank towards them.

Just then, another woman, with blonde, wavy hair disembarks from the ship, as she holds onto a young child in her arms.

El smiles warmly at them, "Anna! It's so good to see you!" the blonde woman smiles warmly as she gives El a slight side hug. "It's great to see you too, El". And El's eyes move down to the young child in her arms.

"Oh, my! Is this your little girl! We've all been dying to meet her since Will wrote to us saying you gave birth!" El exclaims looking at the year old child.

Will and Mike come to stand beside the woman, as Will moves to take the child from the woman's arms, "Yep, this is Elizabeth" he says proudly, as the rest of the crew moves to meet Will's daughter.

"Wow, she's the spitting image of you, Anna!" Dustin exclaims as everyone eyes the girl, who begins to tuck herself into Will's arms.

"Yeah, but she's shy just like Will" Max quips, poking fun at their friend, who merely rolls his eyes.

"Ha, ha" he says dryly, while everyone laughs in return, but then a knowing booming voice echoes from behind them, "She might be quite, but she sure is cute" Hopper makes his way across the boarding dock, and before he knows it, El is making a beeline towards the man as she throws her arms around the unsuspecting man.

"Hopper!" she cries, while the man holds her tight as well, "Hey kid, it's good to see ya" he says in his low deep voice. El looks up to the man who looks more shabbier with his grown beard that is riddled with white hairs, she smirks, "Looks like you've gotten older out there".

Hopper rolls his eyes, "Yeah well, with a smaller crew and tighter deadlines, I'm bound to get a couple" he moves to stroke his beard.

"Where the grandkids at anyways, it's been too long!" he cries over our heads, and just then, Jaimy, Clara and Georgie cut through their small group, and right towards Hopper, who's waiting with open arms.

"Grandpa!" both Jaimy and Clara exclaim, wrapping themselves into the mighty mans arms, as he envelops them. "Ah, good to see you kids!" he starts then bends himself down lower, so to include Georgie into the hug, "You kids have grown, and it's only been a year?" he jokes, as he bends and picks Georgie up.

"Yeah, I've grown a lot!" Clara exclaims and Hopper ruffles her hair, "You sure have princess, and you look just as beautiful as your mother".

He then turns to Jaimy, he rubs his hair affectionately too, but the boy pulls away slightly giving the man a frown, "Heh, and look at you, just as tall and lanky as your father".

At this the group laughs as Mike rolls his eyes. El moves towards her

oldest, "Yes, but he is quite the ladies man, right Jaimy?" she can't help but poke fun at the boy who turns bright red at his mother's words.

"Mom!" he all but squeaks, and Hopper laughs louder, "Turns red just like his father too", and this gets another laugh out of everyone.

Clara then moves and tugs at Hopper's coat, "Grandpa, did you bring back anything?" she asks with shining eyes.

The man gives her a look, "Well, of course I did", he then looks at our group, "Got something for all the kids, why don't we head aboard" he gestures still carrying a happy Georgie as everyone follows him back onto the ship.

El turns to Mike as she hooks her elbow through his, they give each other a warm look as they walk onto the ship. And, for everyone, it's like nothing has changed.

El, Mike, Dustin, Lucas and Will make their way to the center of the ship, as they cast their eyes up a long familiar post. They all give each other knowing looks, and without a word, El is the first to ditch her shoes, as she hooks her feet into the well known knots of the pole, as she begins to climb upwards.

"Hey, where are you guys going?" Joyce cries from below. Being closest to the top, El looks down to see the boys all following with brimming smiles etched on each of their faces, she calls over her shoulder, "Just checking out our old hang out spot, we won't be long!" she calls down as she makes her way into the foretop.

The boys follow her one by one, as they land in their hangout. It's evident that they all have grown quite a bit, and the space is extremely cramped. Especially when a flash of red hair makes her way up as well.

"Hey, just because I came later doesn't mean I'm not welcome here either" she jokes. And we all shake our heads, "Of course not, dear, we didn't want to leave you out" Dustin says as he hooks an arm around her.

"Especially since you guys forced me to get that damn tattoo" she gestures towards her hip, and El smiles wickedly for, she was the one that finally convinced her to get the tattoo before hers and Dustin's wedding.

She can't help but look about at her friends, who are marveling at their spot as a light breeze sweeps around them. El catches the glimmering gold hanging from each of their ears, a pact they made all those years ago.

Her mind then flashes back to that first year, and she can remember how each boy looked. All a lot smaller and ganglier, dirty from the streets. All of them scared out of their minds, but souls ready for adventures.

She smiles fondly at the memory, just as Mike nudges her, "What you thinking about?" he asks her, and she merely shakes her head. "Oh, just of those first days, that first year we were here together, it seems like it was yesterday, but also a lifetime ago" she sighs.

The others let out heavy breaths too. "Yeah, we were so little back then, now look at us, we're married, have kids, it's crazy!" Dustin exclaims, and the rest chuckle.

"Guys, come on, we're waiting!" a voice from below summons them, and they all sigh, moving to stand.

"We're coming!" Lucas cries down to below. But, not before turning back to all of us, sticking out his right hand, and holding open his palm, and there, a small scar lies.

A wind whips around them, their hair moving to its whim, as a silence settles between them. And, one by one, they each hold out their hands, matching scars healed across their palms, and then they join hands.

A feeling of nostalgia, of everything they had been through together moves through them as if an old memory came to life. Without another word, they let go of each others hands, sharing warm, gentle smiles. As Lucas makes the first move to step over the side, Dustin, Max and Will following.

El goes to follow as well, but a hand stops her. She turns and sees a smirk cross her husband's face. He quips an eyebrow at her, "You remember right? This is where you told me everything, where we shared our first kiss" he reminisces.

El softens, "How could I forget? I was so scared" she moves so that she is close to Mike's chest as he holds her close.

"And look at where we are now" he says looking down to their group of friends, their family, who are milling about.

She can see that Hopper is still holding onto Georgie as he shows him the helm, and has him grip the wheel, as Joyce stands off to the side, smiling softly. Jaimy and Grace are standing next to one another looking over the side of the ship, sharing a soft conversation. While Clara runs about the deck with the rest of the little ones old enough to play, their laughter ringing across the deck.

Their shipmates look about happily, proud written on each of their faces as they stand with their own small families, watching their children play.

A smile tugs at the corner of El's lips as she takes it all in, and then turns back to Mike, who's giving her that look that melted her heart that first day, all those years ago.

"I wouldn't have believed this is where we ended up" she admits. And Mike moves to nuzzle her gently, "Are you happy?" he asks.

The words sink into El, and she knows the answer with all her heart. She gazes into the eyes of the man who captured her heart, her everything, and she can feel him returning that same intensity.

She moves to wrap her arms around his neck, as he holds her tightly across her waist, pulling her closer, "I've never been happier" she whispers, bringing her face closer to his.

And just as he's a breath away he smiles before whispering back, "Me, too", and then, they close the gap between them, their lips coming together in their well known dance.

The love, the affection and everything in between is said within that

kiss, as the two melt into the moment together. As if they were once again children, with all their little secrets, this moment is made just for them.

They pull apart with flush faces, and matching smirks, knowing their life together will only grow more perfect.

And, there you have it, it's finally complete! I think this is one of my better chapters in quite awhile, and I hope you all enjoyed it as well.

Finishing a story is always bittersweet, but I'm so happy that it's finally completed, and can change the status. There were times I wasn't sure where this story was going and struggled, but this was always there in the back of my mind, and drove me to completing it.

I truly can't thank all my amazing fans and reviewers throughout this story, you make it possible for writers to write, to fuel that desire to paint a picture using only words.

So, one last time, I truly hope to hear from anyone reading this fanfiction so to get feedback and I just love hearing from you all as well. And, what did you think of the kids and their names too?! Yes, I took Georgie from IT, and Clara I just had to use it because I loved it!

I highly suggest reading the Bloody Jack books as well!

Season 3 can't come soon enough, and now I've got some ideas for Watching Her Fall In Love!

Thank you all again!